

Title: 893

Rating: Mature

Parings: It's gen

Warnings: Harry has potty mouth and is rude. Violence, explosions, martial arts

Beta: 50ft queenie and purpledodah

Disclaimer: I do not own or hold any rights to Harry Potter. Those rights belong to JK Rowling, Warner Brothers and I'm not sure who else. This fan fiction was written for fun, not profit. However, this story does belong to me. Please don't snitch it.

Authors notes: In this story Harry goes to Japan. {Figured that out the easy way, right?} He learns about magic in an environment where he is taught magic but he also invents magic, which he copies from manga. He reads Inuyasha, Gundam Wing, Yu Yu Hakusho, and Ruroni Kenshin. He is not a nice little boy, being raised by Yakuza. He's not necessarily mean either. He just has a slightly different set of morals. {Yes, this is a totally self-indulgent wank on my part.}

While reading, you will notice changes in the way dialog is written. If the speaker is speaking English and there is Japanese included, that's what he is speaking, Japanese words and phrases jumbled into his English. If the speaker is speaking all English, it's just written in English. If the speaker is speaking Japanese and I've translated it, I'll put it in italics. Unless the majority is Japanese, then I'll do it the other way around, I'll put a remark at the beginning of the chapter so you'll know for sure. There will also be some places where someone speaks Japanese in front of English speakers who are speaking English, in that case it will be in romanji, with translations either in the dialog or at the end of the chapter. Titles like 'Oyabun' will always be in Japanese. I also won't try to write that odd brand of English that Japanese people seem to speak. In my world they speak 'proper' English. All Japanese names are Family/Given, unless otherwise noted. Harry will be known by his Japanese name in the first few chapters but I'll make sure you know what it is.

Also, to those who know more about Japan than I do, this is an idealized Japan. Things are not always identical to the real thing. The Yakuza are more active and more visible. Magic is well known but it's like taking a bath in a traditional coop bath house. You see but don't 'look'.

Also, as many abused children do, Harry might act much younger than he really is.

...

The little boy crept into the bushes behind #4 Privet Drive and huddled down. It was late, cold and the dew was just setting on. He was a bad freak and so he was locked out of the house. He was supposed to go to the shed at the bottom of the garden but Uncle Vernon had not unlocked it.

He quailed in terror as voices speaking a strange language approached. If they found him, they would tell Uncle Vernon. He didn't like being an ashtray so he huddled down as close to the trunk of the yew bush as he could get.

"I'm sorry, Oyabun, I know I saw something in the bushes."

"Well, find it, you stupid monkey, and bring it to me."

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'll look."

Harry flinched a bit as the older man smacked the younger one on the back of the head. The younger man didn't seem to notice much and Harry thought it had been more noise than anything else.

When the younger man crouched down again, Harry was torn. If he scrooched back enough that the man couldn't see him, Vernon would. If he stayed where he was, his uncle couldn't get to him, but the other man could.

He wished everyone would go away and let him rest. He hurt all over and he was so hungry that he felt stupid and so thirsty that his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He paid for his moment of inattention. The man snagged his foot and pulled him out. He cried out in pain as he was dragged out, his cut back bumping on the hard earth.

The man called Oyabun looked at the tiny form. "It's a boy!" The man examined the boy for a moment. "Bring him inside, Kuma."

The man holding the boy started to pick him up but Harry took one look at his light suit and whimpered, "No, no! Don't! I'm all dirty, it'll ruin your nice suit. I'll walk. Please."

Kuma spoke very good English so he understood his little captive. "Maa, maa. Hush, you. It'll clean. You must always obey the Oyabun, no matter what he says. He's a very important man."

Harry trembled as he trotted into the house beside the man. His ankle hurt, his back hurt and he thought he was bleeding from somewhere. He was going to make a mess and the Oyabun would be mad. He wondered how hard the man would beat him, or would he just have Kuma shoot him with his gun. Harry knew the man had one, he'd seen it when he pulled him out from under the bush.

The Oyabun turned in the kitchen and said, "Stand there. Who are you? Why are you spying on us?"

Kuma translated. Harry had no idea what he was talking about so he just replied, "I'm Freak. I was just ... hiding from my uncle. I'm supposed to go to the shed but he didn't unlock it. He won't care though. He'll just get mad and hit me, cause I'm a bad freak."

Kuma translated this keeping his face as serene as he could. The Oyabun had children, grown now and working in the gumi, but he was well known to have a soft spot for kids.

Miyamoto Musashi looked down at the tiny boy and sighed. "Well, what is wrong with these idiots. He's a perfectly nice looking child. Ask him if he'd like me to be his father." He raised an eyebrow at the look his so-honbucho was giving him. "Don't look at me like that. I've been wanting a toy child for a while. He'll do as well as any other."

Kuma was some sort of nephew of the Oyabun and knew that he didn't mean a 'sex toy' child but a child that was a 'toy' in the way of being spoiled, indulged and taught to amuse the parent with witty conversation and tumbling and such.

"As you wish, I'll ask him." Kuma turned to the small boy and said, "Your people are not nice to you. Would you like to come with us? Miyamoto Musashi, the Oyabun, would like you to be his son. What do you think?"

Harry, wary of anything adults offered him, asked, "Can I have something to eat? And some clothes? I know I'm being greedy but ... I'd really like a pair of shoes that fit."

"Well!"

Kuma was a yakuza with at least three murders to his credit but he was nearly in tears as he translated, "He says if he can have something to eat and some new clothes, especially a pair of shoes that fit."

Miyamoto-Oyabun turned to Harry. "You have what you want. Anything. I get you things I think you have too. Yes?" His English wasn't good, that was why he always had a translator and never spoke it in public.

"Yes, please, sir."

Kuma blew his nose then said, "Ok, kiddo. You say, Hai! Chichi-ue. That means, yes, honorable father. You should also bow. You think you can do that?"

Harry carefully bowed, doing a fairly good job of it. "Hai! Chichi-ue!" He blinked at the tall, stern faced man for a moment.

Kuma gasped softly. "Oyabun! Look at his eyes. They are green!"

Miyamoto-sama looked and replied, "Yes, so they are. Jade green. This child is truly a treasure. Take him into the bathroom and get him cleaned up. One of the kobun should have something to fit him. A yukata, perhaps."

Harry followed Kuma to the bath room, taking off his shoes obediently when told to.

Kuma ran a bath, he thought Westerners were filthy, getting into the tub before they were decently clean, but in this case he just helped

Harry strip. He had the tiny boy bend over the toilet then spread his ass cheeks gently with his thumbs.

Harry objected to this, saying, "I wiped my bum good when I went!"

"Just checking. There's blood."

"Oh! Well, the cuts are higher up. It just ran down."

Kuma relaxed. "Sorry, the ... boss would have my finger if I didn't make sure. Here, the tub is full, get in. Wash what you can reach. I'm going to get you something to wear. It'll probably be too big, and Nihon wear, but it'll be clean."

Harry slid into the tub and reached for the wash cloth. "That's ok, Mr. Kuma. What's Nihon?"

Kuma laughed softly. "It's Kuma-kun. I'm no Western Mister. Nihon is Japan. That's where all of us are from. We're here ... conducting some ... business."

"Oh. Can you shoot with that gun?"

Kuma just shrugged. "I get the job done. Why?"

Harry sighed, peeked at Kuma from the corner of his eye and said. "I wish I could shoot with a gun. I'd go shoot Uncle Vernon. He's a bad man. He ... calls me a freak. He ... I won't get in trouble for saying?"

"No. You tell Kuma whatever you want." Kuma winked at Harry broadly. "Maybe Kuma can ... fix things, yes?"

"He hit me with a belt because I got a better score on my paper than Dudley did. He said I cheated. I didn't! How can you cheat on a drawing of a rainbow."

"Mmmm. He's going to get his. We'll figure out something. You! Wash!"

"Yes, sir." And Harry started washing while Kuma went to report to his Oyabun and find Harry something clean.

The only thing he could find was a small yukata that one of the kobun had accidentally packed. It belonged to his little brother so it was only a bit too large, not that uncommon a happening.

He returned to check on Harry and found the water filthy and the little boy quite a bit cleaner.

"Ah, good. Let me change the water, so you can get really clean. I'm going to put down a rug for you to get out on. Then I'm going to dry you off and put some cream on your cuts. It'll sting a bit. Sorry about that, but you don't want an infection." Kuma efficiently drained the tub and started running clean water into it. "I'll just throw away these bloody things. Ok?" Kuma wasn't about to do anything without asking Harry first, even if he knew there was no use for the nasty bloody things.

Harry, who'd been doing a lot of thinking, and some eavesdropping, decided that he was going to trust these men. They had a completely different feel from Uncle Vernon and his bunch. "I ... if I ask you to do something, will you get mad if it's a bad idea?"

"No. I'll just tell you so. What do you want?"

Harry nibbled at his lip, then said softly, "I want to get Uncle Vernon in trouble."

"Ha! Good boy! How?"

Harry gave this rather mild approval a brilliant smile in return. "Well, if we hide my bloody clothing somewhere, like in the shed then call the cops and tell them that I'm missing, they'll do the rest? Maybe?"

Kuma laughed so hard he burped. "Oh! Warui, gomen. I mean, my bad, sorry. You'll have to learn Nihongo. Japanese."

"Ok. But was my idea good?"

"Yes. We'll go talk to the Oyabun. The boss. Miyamoto Musashi-sama. And you'll need a Japanese name. We'll worry about that later, though."

Harry got out of the tub and let Kuma dry him off. He also rubbed stuff into his cuts and bruises. It stank and came in a tin with a tiger on it. He looked at the dress Kuma wanted him to wear and frowned.

"A dress? But, I'm a boy!" His near wail brought Miyamoto-sama to the door.

"What is wrong here?" His gruff snap made Harry quail. "Stand up, young one."

Kuma laughed again. He explained quickly.

Miyamoto-sama smiled at Harry. "No dresses. Boys wear this. I big boy, I wear. Here! Look!" He pulled a wallet out of his pocket and showed Harry a picture of himself in a dress thing with a vest on over it, split toed socks on his feet and straw sandals.

Harry looked at the picture then grinned. "Ok. It's nice with the vest thingy. What's it called."

"A haori. And, when we get back to Nihon I'll get you hakama. That's pants. You'll like them."

Harry gave him a puzzled look. "Don't Nihonese wear trousers. I don't think you should wear pants on the outside."

"Nihon-no. I think we get mixed up a bit. Pants are these." Kuma tugged at the crease in his trousers.

Harry pointed to his dirty underwear. "Those are pants. You wear them under trousers. Where'd you learn to speak English?"

"American city. Chicago. This is going to be fun. Teaching you. Yes." He nodded his head emphatically, his English slipping a bit in his excitement. "Now. Put on this and we'll get you something to eat."

Harry put the yukata on and started to cross the fronts but Kuma stopped him. "No, other way around. Left over right. Right over left is for dead people."

"Ok. But ... Why?" Harry waited. Usually, when he asked a question, he'd get a clout over the head. Only his new father had any idea how much courage it took to ask a simple question.

"Because, if you cross it this way..." Kuma efficiently got the obi wrapped around Harry three times and fluffed the bow a bit. "then you can put things in the pocket formed by the drape. There!" He patted this and pulled at that. "You look very kawaii and kakkoi."

Harry looked at himself in the mirror. He didn't look the least bit girly so he approved, especially when he saw the proud look on his new father's face.

"Chichi-ue! I look ok?"

"Aa! Dai jobu desu ka?"

Kuma helped out. "Yes. Are you well?"

Harry bowed to his father. "Yes. I'm good."

And so his new life began.

"Come! Sit! You had idea? Tell me!"

Kuma picked Harry up to carry him, explaining, "The bathroom floor is dirty. I'll carry you to cleaner. You tell the Oyabun your idea. He'll either tell you it's ok or it's crap."

So Harry explained his idea. "Well, see, everyone here hates me because my aunt and uncle lie on me all the time and Dudley is a prat and beats me up. So, I've been living in the cupboard under the stairs all my life. It's sure to be full of blood, from ... stuff. If I disappear and my bloody stuff is found in the shed, maybe ... the cops will think Uncle Vernon murdered me or something and they'll get into trouble. All the neighbours will gossip about how much trouble they've all had with me and that'll make it even worse 'cause it'll look like they think they had a reason. See?"

Miyamoto-sama thought about Kuma's translation, what he'd understood of what Harry had said, Kuma's rather acidic additions and his own knowledge of human behavior. "Yes. This is good." then he had to switch into Japanese. "Kuma-kun, get Genji Shinichi



in here. I have to think about this a bit. And bring tea. We might as well get ..." He turned his gaze to Harry. "Your name, boy. And your age."

Harry sighed, "Harry Potter sir. Or Freak. But you can call me anything you like. I'm nine." he hoped that Chichi-ue wouldn't like freak.

"Hmmm, we need to find that boy a name. He'll take my family name, of course. But he needs a strong name."

Kuma nodded. "Aa, Oyabun. I'm going now. And I'll bring the boy back some food too."

Kuma, as so-honbucho, or Chief of Headquarters, knew where everyone and everything in the house was. He found Genji Shinichi and told him that he was wanted then went to make tea and something for Harry to eat. He wondered what the boy would like then decided that the boy would probably eat anything.

He had to shake his head. The boy was way too skinny and smaller than he should be. He'd fix that quickly, he decided. "Hai! Hai! Some good food for the boy. Let me see ... miso ... rice ... a bit of fish. Won't do to feed him too much all at once and make him sick."

"You talkin' to yourself and in English? Gaijin make you crazy?"

Kuma shook his head. "No. But we'll all need to practice it a bit more. The Oyabun has a toy child now. He doesn't speak Nihon."

Genji-san thought about that as Kuma filled his tray. "Perhaps not, but ... we shouldn't speak English around him too much. He'll learn quicker if he gets ... drowned? In Nihon. Just let him speak English when he's totally confused ... or gets frustrated. What's the Oyabun want?"

"You'll see. Come on, asshole."

Genji didn't object to being called 'asshole' as the word used was 'kono yaru' and in this connotation only meant 'you'.

They returned to the Oyabun and his chosen child.

Kuma put the tray on the table and started pouring tea.

Harry took the cup that Kuma handed him and said, "Thank you." when his eyes lit on the bowl of rice and fish he looked astonished. "Is all that for me?"

"Yes, and the soup too. Eat slowly or you'll get sick."

Harry looked at the sticks Kuma handed him then at the food. He had no idea how to eat with sticks.

Kuma just laughed and handed him a fork. "You'll learn to eat with hashi later. Just get used to the idea. Dig in."

"Thank you ... Kuma-kun?" Kuma nodded at Harry's questioning of his proper name then turned to the conversation between Miyamoto-sama and Genji-san.

Harry paid attention to his food and the odd, green tea, letting the conversation go by over his head.

"Well, it seems we have a fine addition to the family. He understands revenge well, even at this young age. So, Genji-san, please see to it that the bloody clothing is in sight but not easily seen." Miyamoto-sama thought for a moment. "A break in would be a good reason to call the police. Make sure that a neighbour sees you but don't actually get caught. Yes?"

Genji-san bowed slightly. "Yes, Oyabun, I'll slip around to the other side. That woman there is nosey as they come. I'll rattle the house and take anything of worth that I can lay hands on easily. Jewelry and such. Any money. Anything else I should take?"

"We trying to make it look like a simple break in? Or something more?" Kuma furrowed his brow in thought.

Miyamoto-sama decided. "Make it look like a druggie did it. That way the onus for the young man's disappearance falls directly on the family." He snorted. "If you can call them that. Be seen but be careful."

Later that night, Genji slipped out the back door and into the hedges. Harry watched him go, puzzled as to why the usually very elegantly dressed man was wearing out at the knee jeans and a ragged flannel shirt.

Genji eeled through the hedge, picked the lock on the shed and opened it carefully in case it squeaked. He used a small pen light to look around. What he saw enraged him. There was a bloody, dirty blanket in one corner, obviously the bed Harry slept on when he was forced to stay in the shed over night. He smiled, a rather evil looking thing, and just tossed Harry's old clothing onto the pile and kicked it under the work bench, leaving a trailing corner to make it look like an attempt to hide it. He looked out, checked the sun and eased into the yard next door.

He smiled at the Western idea that a lock would keep a determined Ninja out. It didn't take him long to climb the back of the house and slip into the upstairs window, showing his silhouette to the window peeper next door in the process. He rummaged the bedroom that obviously belonged to the adults. He found a small jewelry box in the bottom of a drawer. It contained a delicate pair of earrings, a necklace and a bracelet. He pocketed it and the envelope of bills that was beside it. He tossed all the dresser drawers onto the floor in the process.

A search of the closet found another, much larger jewelry box which contained mostly bad costume stuff which he tossed onto the floor of the closet. The bottom drawer yielded a pair of emerald earrings in bezel settings, a mans ring with a crest on it and a letter. A shelf above his head attracted his attention and he looked it over carefully. A box contained a sleeper and a baby blanket, since the corner of the blanket had a big P on it he stuffed it all into his backpack and continued his search. He trashed the closet a bit, tossing more stuff on the floor as quietly as he could. He didn't think the family would have noticed anyway, as the tv was so loud as to hide quite a bit more noise than he'd ever make.

He took a quick look into the next room and shook his head. It was a mess, toys everywhere, most of them broken. He couldn't see anything worth taking so he moved on. The next room, across the hall from the messy one was bigger and also full of toys, games and video equipment. He took the hand held games as well as every cartridge he could stuff into his pack. He also stacked the game

systems, he could carry them easily after duct taping them together. He left the cables dangling.

Genji-sama snickered as he eased down the stairs. This bunch was so oblivious that he was tempted to do something silly, like sneak right past them, but he refrained. He did slip into the small office and look for a safe or lock box. He found a lock box in the bottom drawer and just took the whole thing. He didn't care what was in it, just that the theft would cause them annoyance.

He had to do a bit of quick foot work to open the cupboard under the stairs enough to attract attention. He blocked it with a bit of folded paper stuffed into the lock plate and another under the back edge of the bottom. Even if one of them managed to close the door without attracting attention, it wouldn't stay. He took a quick look inside, risking discovery and snarled to himself. No child should be treated this way. He was severely tempted to teach the fat man a lesson. But he shrugged this off as it wasn't what his Oyabun wanted.

He made sure that the nosy woman next door caught sight of him as he forced his way through the hedge. Not what he would usually do as he was perfectly capable of jumping it, but he needed to leave some evidence of intrusion or the police wouldn't search.

He was changed and calmly sipping tea when the police knocked on the door.

Harry flinched at the knock but Kuma patted him on the shoulder. "Now, remember, you don't speak English. Keep your eyes down and hide behind me as much as you can get away with."

Harry frowned. "What time is it?"

Kuma checked his Rolex watch. "Nearly eight. Why?"

Harry managed a quite creditable smirk. "I'm small for my age. Tell them I'm four, instead of nine. I'll just go to bed and pretend to be asleep."

Kuma chuckled and helped him into the bed. "There. Close your eyes. Perhaps you'll actually be asleep soon."

Harry snuggled down in the first bed he remembered sleeping in and fell asleep before Kuma was out the door. It had been a very stressful day and he was worn out.

Kuma entered the parlor just in time, the Oyabun was getting annoyed. The policeman, like many Westerners, seemed to think that the louder he spoke, the better the chance that he'd be understood.

Kuma bowed with just enough depth to be rude, but not enough to be insulting. He knew the subtleties of this were lost on the policeman but still, proprieties should be observed.

"How may I help you?"

"You see anything odd about an hour ago?" The officer was tired, annoyed and just wanted to complete this canvas and clock out. The paper work was going to be killer.

"An hour ago? No, okami." Kuma kept his replies as short as he could. He knew that using the yakuza word for police would go over the officer's head.

"Anyone else in the house that might have seen something?"

Kuma shrugged. "I could ask around. There are four others in the house, but none of them speak English."

"I'd like to talk to them." The officer, oblivious to the twinkle in the older man's eye, set himself up for an interesting conversation.

Ten minutes later, the officer had a headache and all the Yakuza kyōdai were amused. The officer shouted at them, they bowed and exclaimed, "Hai! Hai! Warui, aho!" in very polite tones. The Oyabun had to still his twitching lips several times. Saying "Yes! Yes! Sorry, asshole!" was not something you could get away with in Japan but it was very amusing here.

Finally, he snapped, "Kuma! Yamero! Urusai!" then he turned and walked out of the room. He had to leave before he started laughing. It was not a good thing to laugh in the face of a policeman.

Kuma bowed, too deeply, and said, "I am so very sorry. My boss is a man of little patience. If we wake his ... son, yes, son. He will be most displeased. Most unhappy. The boy is four and asleep. Sorry. Please?" He carefully bowed and edged the man right out the door.

.

While this was going on at the yakuza house, the Dursleys were experiencing some difficulties of their own.

A sharp eyed officer had noticed the open cupboard door and looked inside. He'd called the supervisor and had him look. This had led to a search of the entire property and the discovery of the bloody blanket and clothing. Vernon was now under arrest and officers were searching for the young nephew, who hadn't been seen for several days. The neighbor who called in the break in was just thrilled to tell the officers all about the juvenile delinquent nephew who was always in some sort of trouble or other.

A more through search of the house revealed that the missing boy was nearly erased from existence. No pictures, no proper clothing, no evidence of a bed or other place for him to sleep. There were going to be a lot of questions that needed proper answers.

Petunia only managed to evade arrest because of Dudley. Dudley was just delighted that he didn't have to put up with that freak any longer, his comments only added to the families difficulties.

.

Harry woke in the morning to a cheerful voice calling, "Wake up! Time for breakfast. Oko shimas! Asa gohan!"

Harry scrambled out of bed and struggled to get his yukata rearranged. Kuma helped him with quick, gentle hands then said, "The Oyabun has said that you are to be spoken to only in Japanese. So that you will learn the language quickly. If you get really confused you are allowed to ask questions in English. Please, try very hard. Yes? It will please your Ootosan."

Harry wrinkled his brow in confusion. "I thought he is my Chichi-ue?"

"Yes. But he is not my father. Chichi-ue means 'my father' Ootosan is your father. See?"

"Yes, sir. Aa, Kuma-kun."

"Yatta!" They grinned at each other and Kuma scooped Harry up, tossed him over his shoulder and carried him to breakfast.

Harry loved the breakfast. He had more rice, a whole fish of his own, pickles, miso soup and tea. He even managed to eat the pickles and fish with his hashi. He learned that it was ok to just drink the soup from the bowl but he had to use a china spoon to eat his rice. He just couldn't manage with the sticks. But he was surprised and pleased to find that everyone there thought him incredibly smart to manage what he had. All the kyōdai exclaimed, "Hai! Hai! Yattane!" Smiling and clapping for him. He glowed at the praise and managed, "Gomen, tako."

This made the men all laugh as he'd said, "Thanks, you."

After breakfast, Miyamoto-sama stood up and said, "Harry, I will speak to you in English. That you will understand me. Demo ... but, this is not to be done much. We are going to get you nice clothing. See? You may have anything you like."

Harry thought about this for a moment. "Thank you, Chichi-ue. Are you taking me back to Nihon?"

"Of course! Not leaving you here. Silly boy." Miyamoto-san swelled out his chest a bit. "You are mine now. Do me honor. Yes?"

"Yes, sir, I'll do my best." Harry glanced at Kuma who mouthed the words. "Gambari masu." Harry repeated them.

"Very good. Yattane! You did it! Come, we get stuff now."

Harry was pleased to see that one of the kobun had worn a yukata too. The driver was dressed in a very expensive suit as was Kuma, who usually wore jeans or BDU's and t-shirts at home. His new father was dressed in a suit, with a vest, and looked every inch an elegant, well educated gentleman.

They drove to a nearby shopping centre and found a store that Miyamoto-san approved of.

They went in and he moved through the displays, pointing to things. The kobun took them off the rack and carried them behind him exclaiming, "Hai! Hai! Suteki na sentaku!" meaning 'Yes! Yes! Excellent choice!' at every choice.

Harry just trailed along, looking at the stuff in wonder.

They took the pile to a fitting room, which was locked, but not for long.

Harry blinked as Kuma slipped a bit of plastic into the crack between the door and the jamb and opened it easily. "I wanna learn that. Can I? Please?"

Kuma nodded. "I'll teach you. Japanese please."

"Oh, warui!"

Kuma translated what Harry wanted to say into Japanese then had him say it himself.

"Here! Try on." Harry cringed a bit at the tone of his Chichi-ue's voice.

Kuma patted him on the shoulder. "Maa-maa. Ochitsuite, calm down, Harry-kun. All of us talk like that. He doesn't mean anything bad."

Harry sighed. "Ok, warui, Kuma-kun."

Harry went into the fitting room and started sorting through stuff. He found that his new father had an odd taste for 'cute' stuff. Clothing that Harry wouldn't wear on a bet. He hated Tele-tubies, Sesame Street and Barney. He sifted through until he had a smaller pile of plain or sports related things that he liked.

He put on one outfit and went out to let the others see it.

When he went out, he walked right into the middle of an argument between Miyamoto and a clerk. It wasn't going well, for the clerk, Miyamoto was pretending not to understand any English at all, as



was Kuma. Harry sighed, this was going to be an aggravation that he didn't need.

He needed to interfere before they made enough of a scene that the woman remembered them. He pulled gently on his fathers trouser leg.

"Chichi-ue, I like this. Yes?"

The woman turned to him. "Do you speak English, dear?"

"Yes, ma'am. I was born here. What's wrong?"

"You're not supposed to take that many items into the fitting room. And you're supposed to wait for me to unlock it."

"Oh, sorry. But the door was open. And I don't see a sign anywhere. Not that I can read. Sorry. I'll bring out everything I don't like. Ok?"

Harry immediately decided that he didn't like the woman or her attitude. He wasn't sure what a jap was but he didn't like her tone of voice.

"Chichi-ue. Can I whisper?"

"Yes. What is it?" He bent down and scooped Harry up to rest on his hip.

Harry managed a very creditable whisper, especially for a nine year old. "I don't like that woman. I don't want to buy too much stuff here either. I want to wait until we're in Nihon and get clothing there. Ok?"

"Huh! Good, good. Pick ... three suits. And to wear under. One each."

"A package?"

"Hai! Ichi tsu tsumi des."

"Ok." Harry was put down. He went to find a package of pants, t-shirts and socks. The lady followed him.

"What do you need, sweetie?" Her sickly-sweet tone insulted Harry but he just asked for what he needed and let her go look for it.

He liked the jeans, t-shirt and shoes he had on. So he put them to one side. After trying on several more outfits, he had three that he liked.

One outfit was a track suit with Manchester United logos on the back of the shirt and the leg of the trousers. Another was a simple pair of jeans and a green t-shirt. The third was something Harry had always wanted, a neat button down shirt, vest and dark grey dress trousers. He wondered if he ought to get a tie.

He modeled each choice for the group and got approval from them for everything except the Manchester United set. When he explained that it would be, in his opinion, most comfortable for flying, he was allowed to have it. He swelled with happiness, this was turning out to be the best decision of his life, so far.

It was decided that he'd wear the jeans and t-shirt, but the shoes were already rubbing his toes so he put them back.

"I still need shoes. Those don't fit."

"Sweetie, I measured your feet, those should fit."

Harry just shrugged and said, sullenly, "Well, they don't. I don't want them."

Suddenly, Kuma and Miyamoto-sama were just behind him, pouring on the intimidation. The clerk looked up and made a sound that was suspiciously like, 'eep!'

"Something?"

"She says the shoes should fit. They don't." Harry tried a sulk.

"No sulk. You no like, you no take." Miyamoto-sama's expression made his opinion of the woman and being forced to use his poor English plain. "Onna no baka." He snorted, handed over his credit card and motioned for the wakashu to pick Harry up.

Harry just clung to the man's yukata and whispered, "Domo arigato gozaimas."

"Do ita shimaste, Tenshi." The wakashu smiled at Harry.

They left the store in a clump. Miyamoto turned to Kuma. "I don't like that woman. Her attitude was shameful. The young one needs shoes. Find him some."

"Ok, boss. Right on it."

Harry, meanwhile, had persuaded the wakashu to wander down the sidewalk a bit. He enjoyed the view from this high up and the feeling that no one would bother him. The strong arms supporting him made him feel safe.

"What's your name?"

The wakashu looked at Harry in confusion. Harry pointed to himself, making a fist and jerking his extended thumb at his chest. "Harry. Name Harry." He pointed at the wakashu, making the young man cross his eyes. They both laughed.

The wakashu understood Harry at last and said, "Wa tashi no namae wa Nomura Hoshiyo des." He crooked his hand around to point at his nose with his index finger.

"Nomura Hoshiyo?"

"Hai! Nomura-kun." He smiled and nodded several times.

"Go there, Nomura-kun. Dozo?"

"Ho-kay."

Harry had spotted a shoe store and pointed to it. Nomura-kun ambled in that direction, followed by the rest of the group.

Harry thought they were being very indulgent with him because of his uncle and his many injuries, he would find out later that the Japanese are usually very indulgent with their children and a toy child was even more indulged than normal. He didn't even have to worry about his siblings being jealous of him. His three brothers

were all much older than he was and already out of school and involved in the organization.

Harry looked in the window and saw sandals, shoes and boots all over. He had actually never been to a store before so everything was new and interesting.

"I want those. Please?" Harry turned begging green eyes on his Chichi-ue. The man melted at once. Miyamoto Musashi was the head of one of the largest and most clandestine Yakuza gumi's in existence but he melted into a puddle at the sight of those eyes.

"You have whole store, you want? Dozo?"

Harry smiled sweetly. "No, thank you. Just those boots and that pair of sandals. Please? Kudasai?"

So they went in. Harry pointed to the boots he wanted and the sandals. The man had him stand on a metal thing to find the proper size and Harry wandered around while he waited for his size to be brought out. He found some plastic sandals, commonly called flip-flops, which Kuma called zori. He tried them on and liked them.

Kuma added them to the pile of stuff that was already on the counter. While Harry had been getting sized, Miyamoto had picked out a simple backpack, an umbrella and a hat for Harry. Both the boots and sandals fit properly and the man had brought out a pair of dress shoes as well. They purchased the whole lot and headed back for the car.

Harry managed, "Domo ..." before bursting into tears.

"Maa-maa. Tenshi. No cry."

Harry sobbed, "But I'm so happy. Thank you so very much. I'll be a good son. I promise."

They quickly went to the car to hide Harry's crying. Miyamoto-sama took him on his lap, patting his shoulders and whispering soft words in his ear.

Harry was calm by the time they got home. Nomura-kun insisted on carrying Harry into the house as he was still hitching his breath a bit. The poor wakashu was jumped the second the others saw Harry.

"What did you do to him, asshole."

"Shit, you made him cry."

Kuma broke it up before it got too rough. "Stop! He's just too happy. Nomura-san didn't do anything. Go away! You're scaring the kid."

Harry, put down at last, bowed to the group. "Thank you. You are ... pretty? To me."

Since the word, *bijin*, meant beautiful one, they all laughed. The tension broke and Harry was led into the parlor to go through the stuff Genji-sama had stolen to see what he wanted to keep. He wasn't shown any of the jewelry as it was decided to put it back until he was older. Miyamoto-san went through the papers and declared that the Gaijin were all stupid. Who was dumb enough to leave a child on a doorstep with only a note?

"Now, how to explain him to the authorities."

Genji shifted through the papers carefully. He exclaimed in pleasure, "Here! His birth certificate. I ... hummmm. Not hard at all. I'll just ... yes." He carefully examined the paper. "I can do this. Everyone knows that we all use Western names without worrying about legalities. So ... you were here about the time the young one was conceived. I'll use a bit of chemical magic and remove the name of James Potter. Common name. Bah! And you sign it. Then you claim that you were unaware of the boy until someone said something about him being abused. So, you came here to find out what was going on. Found that he was being hurt by his mother's boy friend and brought him back with you, signing the birth certificate at that time. No one will question that much. We'll handle all the appropriate paper work in Nihon and there we are. Yes?"

Miyamoto smiled happily. "Yes, that will work very well. A bit of grease here and there. All questions ignored and I have a son. Good work."

Harry, happily involved in going through his treasures, the hand held games Genji had taken from the Dursleys, had no idea how easily he had just disappeared from Britain. He was actually much more interested in the promised okonomiyaki for lunch.

.

Albus Dumbledore looked up from his paper work and grabbed his wand. "Minerva! There's trouble at the Dursleys. Hurry."

He tossed some floo powder into the fire and stepped through to Arabella Figg's house. "Mrs Figg! What's happening?"

"I don't know. I've been keeping an eye on the boy like you asked. He's a bit on the fat side but otherwise healthy."

Dumbledore looked at her for a second. "Fat? Well, never mind." Minerva stepped through just then. "Minerva, what is all this?"

"Muggle Aurors. I don't like this."

She waved her wand, transfiguring her robes into more muggle style garments and hurried out. Dumbledore settled on questioning Arabella about Harry.

"So, he's a bit overweight?"

"Yes, and he keeps his hair so short that you'd never know it was blond." She shook her head.

Dumbledore felt a cold chill run down his spine. "Blond? What about the other boy? The dark headed one?"

"Oh, that one. You hardly ever see him. Dirty thing. Always slinking around in the shadows."

"Oh, dear. This is not good. That one is the boy I sent you to watch. Not the blond one. Dear, dear, dear." Dumbledore sighed. "I'll have to go myself." His attempt at muggle garments wasn't as successful as McGonagall's. He looked every inch the eccentric.

When they went to ask questions they were both appalled to find that there was some suspicion that the young nephew had been murdered.

"Albus!" Minerva grabbed his arm.

"Calm yourself. The instruments show that he's injured in some way but not dead." He eased off to listen to the neighbors.

This led to the knowledge that he had made a terrible mistake leaving Harry here. But his instruments hadn't shown anything. They were noodling along, clearly indicating that he was healthy and well protected. The wards were up, but failing quickly in his absence.

Mrs Figg managed to hear a bit, and, as the local 'crazy', she found it easy to ask any question she liked. She found that Harry was known as 'that Potter boy' and thought to be a delinquent, liar and thief. His discipline was discussed in vague terms that made her uneasy.

The three gathered in the kitchen to compare notes and wait until they could get to the Dursleys and ask some very pointed questions.

It turned out that they got more information quite soon, a policeman turned up to ask Arabella some questions. Dumbledore claimed to be a cousin, on an evening visit. McGonagall just kept her mouth shut and glowered. One remark, made in a thick Glasgow accent, turned the officer back to more intelligible conversation.

They found that, due to the report of a prowler from the neighbor, the knock brought evidence of a burglary and some very disturbing evidence that the nephew was a 'person of concern'. In other words, no one had seen the boy for more than 72 hours. Blood in the cupboard under the stairs and the back yard shed also raised some concerns. Arabella had to report that she hadn't seen the boy in at least a week.

After the officer left, Dumbledore flooed back to his office and brought back some of his instruments. They continued to whistle and hum merrily for a few more moments then they all went nuts. The wards had fallen and they were now reacting to Harry's true condition. Dumbledore paled. They all said the same thing, he was not in good health, but he was in no imminent danger.

Minerva sighed. "How large a ward did you establish?"

"#4 and a house on each side. I did allow for him to be able to play with his neighbours, you see."

"Well, he has left the confines of the wards or they've fallen."

Dumbledore waived his wand to make sure. "They've fallen. But ... I need to run a test or two, but ... wards ... hummm. If what has happened is what I fear. Well, Harry was protected from all outside influences, even my instruments. This is not a good thing."

After the police left and they were sure that Petunia and Dudley were the only people in the house, they went over.

Dumbledore didn't bother to knock, he just walked in followed by Minerva and Severus Snape, the potions master of Hogwarts. Dumbledore had sent for him to come just before they started over.

"Severus, you have a way to tell if there is blood, and what kind it is?" The black haired man nodded. "Please check the cupboard under the stairs and the backyard shed."

"As you wish." He nodded to the tall skinny woman. "Petunia."

Dudley puffed up at the sight of all these strangers. "You're not supposed to be here. You're all freaks, just like Potty. I'll tell Daddy."

Severus just loomed over him, scowling in a manner that intimidated people much older than nine. "I am a Professor of Potions at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Not a freak. Watch your tongue, young man, or I'll pickle it. Petunia, control your sprog."

He opened the door to the cupboard and eyed it with disgust. This was not the way he expected Harry Potter, the Saviour-of-the-Wizarding-World, to be treated. This was not the way he expected a beggar child to be treated. He opened a small vial, tapped it with his wand and muttered something. A cloud of smoke issued from the vial which he waived around, making sure that the vapor covered every surface in the small space. He waived his wand again and areas began to glow. There was a lot of glow.



"Dumbledore, you need to see this. It's not good."

He stepped away so Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall could see. They both looked, paled and turned on Petunia.

Dumbledore said softly, "Be glad you are a woman and that Vernon is in jail. This is appalling. What on earth were you thinking?"

"That we never wanted the little freak. If you insist on dumping something like that on someone's doorstep without warning, arrangements or pay. Well, you get what you pay for." Petunia never knew how close she got to being hexed by the greatest and most powerful wizard alive.

Minerva McGonagall wasn't so nice. "Ye besom, ye'er nor better 'an a bin howker. T' owd banger deserved ta be clapped up." She took a deep breath, gave a little sniff and stormed out into the back yard. Even Snape stared after her.

Dumbledore opined, "Oh, my." and followed her.

Severus glowered at Petunia then said, "Run." and followed.

It didn't take them long to check the shed. It had some blood in one corner but the really incriminating evidence of the bloody blanket and clothing had been removed by the police. They still found enough to be of concern.

"I'd still like to know why my instruments didn't register any of this. I'm ashamed of myself. I should have come to check myself, instead I relied on Arabella and my devices. A frail straw, it seems. She was watching the wrong boy."

He went to stand in the middle of the back yard, waived his wand around for a bit then stood with slumped shoulders. It seemed that the wards had blocked the signals to his instruments, giving the impression that nothing was wrong with Harry, when everything was wrong. All the signals had built up behind the wards and were now being recorded for magical posterity.

Snape sighed, this was not good. He had hated the boy's father with a passion, but loved the mother. He could only hope that no real

harm had come to the boy. That they would soon find him. He was to be disappointed.

Dumbledore called Petunia out and gave her the dressing down of a lifetime. He actually raved at her. She just stood there with bugging eyes. The power that poured off the old man was astonishing, it also caused a heat lightening storm of massive proportions.

McGonagall eyed Petunia then held her hand out, palm to her. "May the devil damn you to the stone of dirges or to the well of ashes seven miles below hell and may the devil break your bones. And all my calamity and harm and misfortune for a year on you." and with that, she apparated away with a loud crack.

Petunia shivered as a cold chill ran down her back.

Snape looked at Dumbledore who just replied, "I wouldn't dare." They both cracked away and Petunia was left to her fate.

It took three weeks for the investigation to decide that there was not enough proof to charge Dursley with anything except child abuse. He was sentenced to three years confinement. Petunia was also charged but put on probation in the interests of Dudley. But she was subjected to unannounced inspections for the next four years and ordered to take Dudley to a nutritionist and anger management classes. The neighbors gossiped about that for years.

.

Morning came and Harry dragged himself out of bed. The heat lightening had woken him up and the remaining ozone in the air was giving him a headache.

He grumbled a bit as he washed up for breakfast. He was hungry and didn't want to miss breakfast. Supper had been something called Yakisoba, noodles and stuff. He didn't do a very good job so Kuma made him go back and do it again.

"Kuma-kun, I'm hungry. I don't want breakfast cleared away before I get some."

Kuma looked at his sulky face and laughed. "You'll get gohan. I promise. You'll never go hungry again. And that hair." He shook his

head. "I don't use hair ... stuff. But maybe one of the younger brothers will have something." Kuma knew he was supposed to speak only Japanese to Harry but the poor kid looked so confused that he took pity on him and said things in English then repeated it in Japanese.

"Hair stuff? Like what?"

"Wax, or stuff. I don't know the name. I'll see what I can find. If you don't like it, we'll wash it out again. What can it hurt?"

Harry agreed calmly enough, especially after the promise that they would wash it out.

It didn't take long for Nomura to show up with a tin container of some waxy stuff that slicked Harry's hair back from his forehead and into what Kuma called a pompadour. Harry wasn't sure he liked it as it showed off his scar too much.

Nomura just touched it and asked, "How did you get that?"

Harry puzzled that out and said, "Car wreck. My parents were killed, I got this ..." he pointed to it, "And the Dursleys got me. Sucks."

Kuma made him say it again in Japanese as they headed for breakfast.

Miyamoto looked up as Harry entered, wearing the Manchester United jogging suit and a pair of socks. "You look good, my son. Come! Sit! Eat!"

Harry scrambled into a chair but grinned at his father happily. "Arigato, Chichi-ue. I'm really hungry. Um ... can I have an orange this morning?"

"Yes, an orange is good. And a nice smoked fish." As he spoke Miyamoto put his newspaper down on the table.

Kuma brought a tray with bowls on it and put their food in front of them.

As they ate Miyamoto pointed to various things and said their names in Japanese. Harry obediently repeated the words.

"I am not sure I like that hair. Perhaps if ..." Miyamoto reached over and ran his fingers through Harry's hair, loosening the strands a bit and tugging a lock over his scar. "There! Yes, just like that."

Harry glanced at his image in the mirrored front of a cabinet. "I like that better. Arigato."

"Dou itashi mashite." Miyamoto nodded to Nomura. "Take him away. Amuse him. Show him some manga. Kids like manga, yes?"

"Ok boss. I've got a Yu Yu Hakasho he might like. I'll read it to him. Start him on reading."

"Good, good. You're his body guard. I charge you with his safety. Understand?"

"Yes, boss. I'll take good care of him."

Nomura guided Harry out the door, chattering at him in Japanese.

Kuma and Genji started making plans to get them back home with the least amount of aggravation to Harry.

.

Nomura took Harry into the parlor where the other three wakashu were reading manga or watching tv. "Hey, asshole, give me that!"

Nomura snatched his manga out of the hands of the wakashu who was reading it. He settled Harry on the couch by dumping the junior man on the floor with a swat. "Go read something else. I am going to read to that one. Teach him something. See?"

"Yeah, I do. But he needs a name. We can't keep calling him by his Westerner name. It's not proper."

Harry was startled to see that the man who had gotten dumped didn't seem the least bit put out. He settled on the couch happily enough though and was pleased to see that Nomura held a comic book in his hands. "Oh, comics, I like comics."

"Manga. Say, manga."

Harry obediently did so and settled to look at the pictures while Nomura read to him. He was startled to realize that the symbols were a whole word, except for some, which were phonetic. He hoped he could learn to read quickly. He made a good start with Nomura, learning enough that he could puzzle out most of what the simpler kanji said.

After reading the whole book, Harry made his first real demand. "I want a Nihon name."

Nomura nodded. "Ho-kay. What?"

"Yusuke. I like it. Ii ne Please? Kudasai?" Harry gave Nomura his best pleading eyes.

"I think so. You like it? Good, good. I'll tell the boss, if he says ok. It's good. You understand?"

Harry wasn't sure exactly what Nomura had said. But part of it was surely ask your father. Oyabun was his Chichi-ue's name. He was puzzled by all the different names for the man, surely he was very important to have so many.

One of the men got up and announced. "I'm going to teach him how to introduce himself properly. Yusuke, look!"

Harry looked up at the man and gave a tentative smile. He smiled back, revealing several gold teeth.

"You say. Hey! You assholes, listen. My name is Miyamoto Yusuke. Pleased to meet you. Be nice to me." The slurred vowels and trilled r's made it sound even more rude than it was, but Harry thought it was wonderful.

The wakashu helped Harry learn it perfectly, even down to the proper stance; a slight bow with his right arm held out, elbow bent, palm facing his chest, left fist on his hip. When he started to bow his head, Nomura chuckled him under the chin. "No! You never take your eyes off who you are introducing yourself to. It's rude. Unless you intend to imply that you don't think they are dangerous."

Harry puzzled over that. The only bit he'd understood was 'no' and 'eyes'. He mouthed it over until he could say it. He'd ask Kuma about it later. For now he just said, "Ok."

So it was that Harry introduced himself for the first time in true Yakuza fashion. Miyamoto Musashi was amused. He also privately told Genji to find Harry some tutors so he wouldn't talk like a common yak all the time. He also showered Yusuke with praise and gave him forty pounds. Harry/Yusuke was ecstatic.

Near noon, Kuma went to find Harry who was learning to play Hanafuda.

"Yusuke, come. We are going on the plane to Nihon. We'll be leaving in an hour. You need to pack."

Yusuke stood up. "Ok. I don't have much to pack. It'll all fit in my pack. Help me?"

"Ok. We'll be speaking English to you to help get us through the airport as quickly as possible but don't get used to it."

"Hai, So-honbucho Kuma-sama. I won't." Harry grinned up at the big man who laughed heartily at this.

They packed Harry's things quickly and the boy called Kuma twice on calling him Harry.

The second time nearly sent Kuma into tears, he laughed so hard.

"Oi, tako! Wa tashi no namae wa Yusuke des! Baka!" it sounded so funny for the small boy to be saying, "Hey, you! My name is Yusuke! Idiot!" Especially as the form of you was typically yakuza rude.

"Good, good. You'll be fine. You're getting it already."

"Arigato, Kuma-kun." He jammed the last of his clothing into the bag. "There! All done. How soon are we leaving?"

Kuma glanced at his watch, thinking he'd better repack for Harry before they left. "Soon. About half of an hour. Give me your pack. I'll give it to one of the wakashu to carry for you."

"Ok."

.

The drive to the airport was quick enough, Miyamoto was glad they didn't have to go through Heathrow, their flight was leaving from Gatwick.

Check in was easy, they just handed everything to a wakashu and sat down. Harry tugged at his Chichi-ue's sleeve. "I'm hungry."

"We eat on plane. Ok?"

"Ok." Yusuke watched people for a while. "How much longer?"

Miyamoto looked at his watch. "About ten minutes. We're all checked in and we don't have to go through security." He smiled at the little boy. "Diplomatic immunity. Come on, I find you snacks."

He got up to take Yusuke to find something to snack on but a sudden commotion down the concourse made them both turn their heads.

The next thing they knew, there was an explosion and Harry had thrown himself between Miyamoto and the concussion. He didn't realize until later that someone had thrown up a shield.

"Yusuke!"

Harry rubbed the bump on his head. "Ow! Chichi-ue! You ok?"

"Yes. What the hell was that?"

No one had time to answer as they were suddenly surrounded by police and medics. Harry was quickly checked over as were all the group. They were declared uninjured. Their papers were examined then they were allowed to get on the plane, after Miyamoto threw one of his elegant tizzies. Harry watched in wonder as the man got his way without raising his voice or getting rude.

.

As the plane ran down the run way, Harry Potter fell asleep in his seat. He woke up Miyamoto Yusuke, son of Miyamoto Musashi, yakuza Oyabun.



Miyamoto Yusuke woke to find someone bending over him. He cringed back, expecting a blow but the lady in the pretty suit said, "Wake. Food." and put a tray on the support she'd pulled down from the back of the seat in front of him. She smiled at him and bowed. Yusuke smiled a bit hesitantly and tried to bow back. He did a creditable job for someone seated, especially at his age.

"Thank you." Yusuke settled to eat as best he could.

The food was interesting; small balls of rice with bits of things he couldn't identify on top of them. There was also a small pile of paper thin slices of pink stuff, a little ball of green paste and some brown liquid in a small pitcher. A pot of tea and a cup completed the setting. He decided he liked flying, especially first class.

He glanced around, seeing his new father seated one row in front of him with Genji-san next to him. Hoshiyo-kun was nowhere in sight. He remembered hearing him say something about 'toyre'.

Yusuke managed his hashi fairly well. He'd had the good fortune of finding that Hoshiyo-kun liked kids. He knew just how to help him learn to use his utensils quickly. Yusuke still wasn't very good with rice but he was sure he'd do better with practice.

He decided to taste the green stuff first, so he picked it up with his hashi and popped it into his mouth. He gasped softly then whimpered, it felt like his mouth was on fire. He felt tears streaming from his eyes. He wanted to spit the stuff out, but he mustn't waste food.

Hoshiyo sat back down and noticed that Yusuke was crying. He shifted so he could see. "Yusuke-kun? What is wrong?" All the boy could do was whimper. "Let me see."

Yusuke opened his mouth and stuck out his tongue. " 'S 'ot."

Miyamoto was reading some important contracts, but he put them away at once when he heard Yusuke speak. He got up and went to him.

"Yusuke, why did you eat all the wasabi? It's not good. Here." He took his silk handkerchief from his pocket and held it under Yusuke's chin. "Spit it out." Yusuke obediently spit the wasabi paste into the

handkerchief. "Now," Miyamoto mimed swishing and spitting. "rinse and spit." He handed over a glass of water that the stewardess brought.

Yusuke took a big gulp and swished it around in his mouth. He was presented with a waste can, lined with a plastic bag. He spat the water out into it and rinsed again.

"Better?"

"Yes, Chichi-ue. Thank you. Can I please speak English?"

Miyamoto patted Yusuke on the shoulder and said kindly, "Yes."

"What was that stuff. It was really hot." Yusuke made a face.

"It is wasabi. You are only supposed to put a little in the soy for flavor. Not eat the whole thing. Are you ok?" Miyamoto picked Yusuke up and sat in the seat, placing the boy on his lap.

"Yes, I think so. I'm sorry. I know I'm not supposed to waste food but it was so hot."

"Not your fault. Where was Hoshiyo-san?"

"Um ... in the loo."

"The what?" Miyamoto gave Hoshiyo a 'you better explain quick' look.

He immediately began bowing and apologizing. "I'm sorry. I went to the reliefment. It is dirty by the way. I was only gone a moment. I'm sorry."

Yusuke interjected, "Please, Chichi-ue, don't be mad. He told me he was going."

"Ah! A man must do as he must do. You are not hurt. Finish eating. Yes? And no more eating wasabi. Silly boy."

Yusuke just smiled. "I'm sorry for bothering you."

"No bother. You eat your food, you're too skinny." He patted the boy on the head and returned to his seat.

Hoshiyo sighed. That had been a near thing, he was very glad he had not stopped to chat with the stewardess as he'd been half inclined to do.

"Here. Wasabi, in shoyu. Not much. Dip. See?" Hoshiyo demonstrated.

Yusuke dipped a piece of sushi in the soy and managed to get it all into his mouth.

"Mmmm, good. I like it."

"Don't talk with your mouth full. The Oyabun won't like it." Hoshiyo grinned a bit.

"Sorry." Yusuke used 'warui'. "What is this?"

"That's tako. Octopus."

"It's nice." Yusuke addressed himself to his food, dropping conversation in favor of sushi.

.

The whole group of yakuza slept most of the rest of the flight. They'd left in the late afternoon, the questioning after the explosion had taken three hours then the 'short' wait until they could board was another two. The flight that should have taken off shortly before 12 noon was finally in the air at 5pm. No one was surprised at all, just grateful that it hadn't taken longer. But this meant that they would be coming into Tokyo at about 5am, if all went well, which it rarely did.

Yusuke yawned when Hoshiyo shook him awake. "Put your hand over your mouth. Your soul will fly out."

Yusuke patted back the yawn. "We there?"

"Nihongo, Yusuke."

"um ... Warui, Hoshiyo-kun. Are we there yet?" Yusuke had the perpetual cry of the traveling child down pat.

"No, not yet."

"How much longer?"

"Not long." Hoshiyo glanced at his watch. "Maybe thirty minutes."

"Ok, thanks." Yusuke settled back in his seat to wait for the plane to land. He was tired of sitting still and waiting, but he remained patient, at least he wasn't still in the cupboard, or working himself to death. Things were definitely looking up.

.

The landing was accomplished with a minimum of fuss and the plane taxied to the gate. People did whatever it was they did while Yusuke looked on with interest. Everything was fascinating to a boy who'd never even been out of his neighborhood.

They went straight from the plane to another. Kuma came to explain to Yusuke that they were changing planes to fly to Hokkaido where the family home was.

Yusuke was delighted by everything he saw, pointing and asking questions in his broken Nihon-do.

Nomura-kun turned and picked him up. "I carry you now. You small."

Yusuke was now confused, there were too many names floating around for the same person.

"Onamae wa nan des ka?" Yusuke was determined to sort this out now.

"We speak English for this. Yes?" The gaki knew the little boy was totally confused, the furrow between his eyebrows told its own story.

"Ok, we won't get in trouble?" Yusuke didn't want to be in trouble before he'd even seen his new home.

"Ie. No trouble. You ask."

"What is your name? All your names are Nomura-kun, Nomura-san, Hoshiyo-san, Hoshiyo-kun; what is it? I'm confused."

So the man carefully explained that his name was Nomura Hoshiyo, his family name was Nomura and his given was Hoshiyo. He also carefully explained that he was just a gaki, a low ranking member of the extended family that was the Miyamoto-gumi. He also explained the meaning of kun, chan, san, sama and aniki. Yusuke listened carefully finally sorting out a few of the connotations of the different appellations. All the differences had to do with whether the speaker was of higher or lower rank than the person they were speaking to and whether they were friendly, true friends or just acquaintances.

Yusuke was satisfied and confused at the same time. He understood the explanation but wasn't sure what to call anyone. He braced himself then said, "Yes! I think I understand. Thank you. What can I call you?"

"You call me Hoshiyo-kun. Now we go to the next airplane to Hokkaido."

Yusuke worked hard, learning Japanese as quickly as he could. Since he was a very smart little boy, he was learning very quickly. In one way he was lucky as Japanese sentence structure was different from English and a lot was left to the listener to understand from context so he could manage a whole sentence with a few words.

Hoshiyo-kun was a lot of help and a great deal of fun. He cracked jokes in Japanese then explained why they were funny. Yusuke loved it. He even got a little loud. When he realized it, he hunkered down in his seat, expecting a smack. His Ototo came to see what the noise was about and when Yusuke flinched he just patted him on the head and said, "Not so loud, ok?"

Yusuke just nodded, wide-eyed, then whispered, "Warui, Ototo."

Musashi just smiled and said, "That's ok. You are just young yet. You are a good boy."

Yusuke brightened, "Arigato."

Musashi smiled even wider. "Very good."

He returned to his seat, well aware that his simple reprimand had frightened the little boy, also that his mild praise had pleased him a great deal more than it should. He vowed to find out who had left such a tender soul with those pigs.

The plane landed, as all planes do, and they disembarked to get on the plane to Hokkaido.

Hoshiyo carried Yusuke again, and the little boy was glad of it. He was nine, but small for his age and he still wasn't healed from his uncle's abuse. He was also still weak from starvation, although that was fading rapidly. The effects of malnutrition would take longer.

Hoshiyo kept up a running commentary in English and Japanese about what was going on. Yusuke was happy to rest and listen. He couldn't believe that a boy as old as he was needed so many naps.

.

They landed in Hokkaido and were told they'd have to wait a bit for the helicopter that was to take them the rest of the way so Musashi decided that they should look around a bit.

Musashi was showing Yusuke the kimono shop when it happened. A man just appeared out of nowhere and attacked. He slashed at Musashi, but Yusuke, seeing the huge knife slashing at his new father, jumped from his arms right into the knife. It slashed him across the forehead, right across the scar already there.

Yusuke screamed as the pain cut through his head. Then a very strange thing happened, a thin thread of black smoke rose from it and dissipated with a faint moan. No one noticed as the gush of blood that followed was more obvious.

Suddenly, all the nice men Yusuke already loved, were not so nice anymore. One kobun jumped the man and had him in an arm lock. Another yanked a large handkerchief from his pocket and pressed it to Yusuke's forehead. Miyamoto-san barked orders so fast that Yusuke had no chance of following them. He was handed off to Kuma who took him away for medical attention. Yusuke tried to struggle but Hoshiyo-kun calmed him with a quick whisper.

While Yusuke was attended by a medic from the small clinic in the airport, the police were sorting out what had happened.

It seemed that the man was demented. He blamed Musashi-san for the death of his father, a man who had committed suicide by jumping in front of a truck. His suicide note blamed shame at being unable to pay a debt.

The medic looked at Yusuke's forehead and said, "Not bad. Not good either. I'll take a picture of him now, clean him up and take another. Sorry, but we want to make the best case we can, right?"

Kuma gave the medic a raised eyebrow. The medic just smiled a bit and said, "Maa-maa, I'm connected." He shrugged. "My Dad needed a loan, I'm paying it off. Good interest rates, too."

Yusuke wiped at the blood that was trickling down into his eye and sighed. It was always this way, adults didn't care what happened to him, they just talked over his head without concern.

Kuma reached out and took his hand, "Don't touch. We need a picture first. For the Okami."

Yusuke blinked at him, trying to sort out how to ask his question without getting into trouble for speaking English. "I ... um ... Okami?" He settled for just using a questioning tone of voice.

"Okami. Japanese Police." Kuma shrugged, dismissing and concern.

The medic snickered softly. "Oi, you're teaching him to talk like a kobun." He turned to face Yusuke and said, "You call police Pori or satsu. Ok? At least to their face. Right?"

Yusuke just nodded. "Hai, bosu."

The medic put his camera away and used several steri-wipes to clean the blood off. "Ok, here we go. I'm ... chi' Baka watashi o." Yusuke grinned at the mix of English and Japanese and stored the words away for future questioning of Hoshio-kun. The medic carefully pulled the edges of the cut together and taped them with funny looking bits of tape that he called 'chō' or butterflies. It hurt a bit but not more than Yusuke could stand. Then he took another picture. "Ho-kay, all done."

Then a policeman came in and started asking Yusuke questions, in rapid Japanese. He didn't understand a thing the man was saying so he shook his head. The policeman took this the wrong way and started shouting at him, which only confused him more.

Then a chill, but polite voice asked, "Excuse my impertinence but ... Why are you shouting at a child that only speaks English?"

The policeman stared at the intruder for a moment then bowed, "I'm sorry, sir. But he won't answer any questions. He just looks at me."

Yusuke decided that he didn't like Japanese police much, they were all stupid. He wondered what part of 'He doesn't speak much Japanese.' the man didn't understand. Yusuke understood that much Japanese easily, as he'd been hearing it most of the day.

The senior officer gave the policeman a weary look. "The boy is English. He does not speak Nihon. Get out!"

The officer sputtered a bit but left.

The officer turned to Kuma-san and said, "I'm sorry. That one is going to be trouble. Dumb as a box of rocks." He turned to Yusuke and said, "Now, young sir, just tell me what happened the best way you know how. My English is good."

Yusuke glanced at Kuma who nodded. "Ok. Well ..." And so Yusuke told how he'd seen the man and known that there was no way his Ototo could have dodged the blow. Not with his arms full of Yusuke. He ended by saying, "So what was I supposed to do, let that crazy man kill him?"

The lead detective sighed, closed his notebook and said, "No, that would never do. You're a very brave young man. Very well done. I will go now and file my report. Good day." and with that he tucked his notebook away and left.

Miyamoto-sama came in just then and eyed Yusuke for a moment. He looked at the medic and asked, "Is he going to heal well?"

The medic nodded. "He will be fine in a few days. He's already started healing. But there will be a scar for some reason. I can tell."



Yusuke frowned then said softly, "I'm doing something freaky. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I'll ... stop. I think."

The medic just shook his head and frowned too. "Sorry. What did he say?"

Miyamoto-sama glanced from the medic to Yusuke then asked, "Are you double connected or just once?"

The medic rose and bowed. "Double, Oyabun. What do you need?"

"Can you do a magical test?" Miyamoto-sama flicked his eyes to Yusuke, "Without scaring him?"

"Yes. Not a problem at all." He picked up a pen and wrote something on a slip of paper. "Oi, shut the door, you."

Kuma just shut the door.

The medic handed the paper to Yusuke and said, "Don't be afraid, it won't hurt." then he said, "Hajimemas!" the paper glowed bright green then turned to ashes.

"Nani?" Yusuke jumped then turned scared eyes to his father. "I didn't do anything! I swear!"

Musashi looked inordinately pleased and replied, "No, you didn't but ... you are magical. Tell me, have you ever done odd things?"

Yusuke nodded, scrunching down in his chair. "Yes, sir, I've done freaky stuff. That's why the Dursleys didn't like me. I'm a freak."

"I see. Well, here in Japan, magic is known. Most who are not magical don't know about it, but those who do, just ignore the unusual. It's not polite to notice or comment on magic. Those who do not know of magic don't realize what they've seen and are too polite to comment. The one's who are stupid enough to see and comment get their ... um ... I do not know the word. They are made to forget." At Yusuke's expression he said, "It doesn't hurt them."

"Oh, ok. So it's ok for me to do ... weird stuff?" Yusuke looked hopeful.

"Yes, it is fine. Just be careful, don't do things without being taught properly. If you have an accident, it's fine. Just tell an adult if one isn't around. Now. We go home. Come." And with that, he picked Yusuke up and walked out the door, collecting Kuma with a glance and dismissing the medic with a flick of his eyes.

Yusuke just clung to his neck, wrinkling his suit. Musashi didn't notice or care, he was just intent on getting his magical child to a safe place where he could inspect him for himself.

"We should have been on the chopper soon, but I've decided to spend the money necessary to bring us straight home. I hate port keys." He glanced at Yusuke's curious expression. "there are several ways of traveling magically. I don't like any of them much. That is why I refuse to leave Japan except when absolutely necessary." He smiled at the little boy's confused expression. "Your Nihon will improve more quickly if you have to struggle to understand. I don't like magic travel. Understand?" Yusuke nodded. "Good. I don't leave Japan because of that, unless I really have to. Ok?" Another nod. "So, we travel by magic called in English, port key, we don't have a name for it as we generally don't use one. Ok?" A third nod answered his question. "Now, don't be afraid, just hold the rope." he demonstrated what he wanted.

Yusuke reached out and gripped the rope. He felt as if someone had grabbed his stomach and dragged him through a hedge. He didn't hear the sounds of distress from his adoptive father as he was a bit busy heaving up yesterday's breakfast.

Genji-san helped his boss up and into a chair, "Oyabun, when are you going to ... never mind." He hid his smile at the dirty look he got and went to get a stomach calming tea.

After drinking the tea both Yusuke and Musashi looked a great deal less green. Yusuke put down his cup and said, "Is it alright for me to speak English? I'm really sure that my Japanese isn't up to the task."

His Father looked at Yusuke then smiled. "OK. I don't speak good. But we manage."

"Thank you." he took a deep breath then suddenly seemed much older. "I want to thank you for rescuing me. I think ... no, I'm sure

Uncle Vernon would have killed me soon. But now ... I need to know what you want from me." He bit his lip for a moment then looked at the men in the room. They all looked surprised. "What?"

Musashi sighed. "You act young. Why?"

Yusuke thought about it for a moment. "Sometimes ... sometimes it helps. I look like a baby, I'm so small, see? And people ... they look at the Dursleys funny, smacking around a baby."

There were nods and sounds of understanding from the men. Musashi looked around. "Ok. Now ... you jumped between me and sword. On purpose? Why?"

Yusuke didn't think about that for a second. "You said you're my father, my ototo ... or is it oyagii, or something else. I'm confused about that. But you ... I just couldn't let him hurt you. It's my duty to help family. Right? Real family." He looked confused for a moment then allowed, "I don't really think of Dumb Dursleys as family."

"Huh! That is good. Family before all. And we are family. Just ... not blood. See. We are yakuza. You ... I want.." Musashi waved a hand. "Genji, you tell."

Yusuke looked at the tall, slender, elegant man and wondered where he'd gotten the scar that cut from his ear to his jaw.

"My name is Genji Shinichi. I am a Fuku-honbucho, an assistant to Miyamoto Musashi, the Oyabun of this gumi. We are yakuza, gangsters. Japanese style." He smiled at Yusuke. "You're not scared?"

Yusuke gave that a bit of serious thought. "No, you haven't hurt me. You bought me clothes and stuff and fed me nice food. Why should I be scared. The only time I got hurt, everyone got really mad."

"Good, good. So ... what we want with you is simple. The boss, Miyamoto-sama, wants a toy child. It is a good thing to be. You will have things you want and need, tutors and teachers, food, as much as you want. The only thing you have to do in return is amuse the boss, be dutiful to the family. Do you understand?"

Yusuke bit his lip for a moment then asked, "Amuse? How? I don't know anything about entertaining someone. The only way I ever did that was ... Dudley got a lot of laughs out of beating me up. I don't ... you won't do that, will you?" His sad expression broke hearts all over the room.

"No! No, no one will beat you here. You will be punished but ... Nihongo don't punish by beating, not a child at any rate. You'll lose your privileges or have to do extra chores. By amuse, we mean things like ... sing, or play an instrument, or do art. Tell funny stories. We will figure it all out as we go along." He caught Yusuke's unhappy face. "Tell. That face is long as a winter day."

Yusuke blurted out. "But what if I can't do ... something that the Oyabun wants."

Musashi just grunted once then said, "Then you cannot do it. You try something else. And you learn aikido and ninjato. No one beat you no more."

Yusuke's smile light up the whole room. "Ok. Thank you. But ..." He glanced around the room then asked, "But who are all of you?"

He was thankful that they all refrained from a full on Yakuza introduction, they just jerked a thumb at their nose and announced their name and function.

He was introduced to Kuma, the so-honbucho, again. Then Nakajima Haruhiro, a saiko-komon, and several gaki that he forgot as soon as they stepped out of sight. There were also the wakagashira, the shateigashira and another fuku-honbucho. They rattled off their names so fast that he didn't understand them but he figured he'd get it all straight sooner or later. He also decided that he'd just call them all sir until then.

Then Miyamoto Musashi surprised all his gumi, he smiled at them all and exclaimed, "Excellent! Now, we shall find my new son a room. Come."

They all trooped after the Oyabun nearly chanting, "Yes! Yes! Whatever you say, boss."

Yusuke soon found himself gazing into a room with no furniture. He looked around for a moment then just looked at his father for an explanation.

It was quick in coming. "In Nihon we do not clutter up our homes with a lot of useless furniture. This is your room in my house. You are also welcome in every other public room, but not private ones. You need an invitation to go in to them. Understand?"

Yusuke nodded hesitantly, he thought he understood most of what was said. He was sure he could ask questions of Kuma and Hoshio if he needed to. "Yes, father. I think so."

"Good, good. This is your closet, your futon must be folded up and put away every morning, except when you put it out to air. Ok?" Harry nodded, eyeing the folded, fluffy mass doubtfully. "Here is your table, you can eat at it, or use it as a desk, but you must put everything away when you are done with it. This is your clothes chest." Yusuke smiled at the chest, it looked like a set of steps with a few decorative and useful bits of pottery on it. "You will also have a writing chest with all the things you need to write with. School books and so on should be kept in it unless you are studying." He turned firm eyes on Yusuke. "I expect you to do well in school. If you need them, I'll hire tutors for you, and you will go to the best juken in the area. Study hard, I won't have you be ignorant, as I know you are not stupid. Ok?"

Yusuke nodded then smiled happily. "I'm glad you ..." He sighed. "My Nihon is so bad. School?" At his new father's nod he continued, "I wasn't let to be smart. I got in trouble for ... being more good than my ... cousin?" Another pleased nod encouraged him. "What is juken?"

Genji answered in English. "Cram school. In this country, we value good students and education is very important. You will be expected to study hard but you will have tutors, especially at first. I think I'll also advise the boss that you have an English As a Second Language teacher. To keep your English good."

Yusuke just grinned, "Ok. Sounds good to me." He looked at his father and smiled again. "Thank you, sir, for giving me this fine room." He bowed properly, causing everyone still in the room to smile proudly.

"It's nothing. Don't worry about it." Miyamoto Musashi smiled at his new son then went to rest. He really hated port keys, they always left him with a headache, and this day had been especially tiring. He went to his room and settled on the engawa to look at the garden and think about his strong new son, a son who'd already proven his worth by saving his life.

Meanwhile, Kuma was showing Yusuke how to set out his futon and how to fold it up to put it away. He also showed him how to handle his table and open and close the shoji. Yusuke loved his room, it was very large for him at 12 ft by 12 ft, also called a six tatami room. It was floored with six tatami mats. Yusuke also learned that his outside shoes were to be taken off at the main door and soft slippers put on, these he would leave at the door of his room. He liked it that he could be barefooted in the house. The only thing that really puzzled him was wearing different slippers in the bathroom.

He knew the room was clean, it sparkled like a diamond, but Kuma insisted that it was contaminated with germs. Yusuke didn't argue, he obeyed happily. He loved it that everyone explained things to him and didn't smack him or call him a stupid freak. The only time anyone had raised a hand to him all the other kobun had jumped him. He would be recovering for a while.

.

Yusuke had been in his new home for a week and was finally feeling settled in. He settled beside his father on a zafu and asked, "Sir, why did you keep me? You told me, but I don't remember very well."

Musashi settled himself more comfortably, changing the cross of his legs. "Ah, well, I have sons, but they're all grown up and in the business. I decided a few months ago to get myself a toy child. So ... when we found you and I saw your eyes, and how badly you were treated, I decided to keep you. See?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, sir, I see. I will do my best to please you. But ... please, what is a toy child?"

"Genji-kun, you explain, I don't want him frightened. My English isn't good enough nor is his Japanese." Musashi shifted a bit to reach his tea.

"Ok, Boss. Yusuke, a toy child is ... a spoiled rotten brat." He grinned, making his scar pull. Yusuke blinked at that for a moment, then just nodded. "In return for getting almost anything your heart desires, you entertain the boss. Tell jokes, tumble, play an instrument ... that sort of thing. And get good grades. Boss hates stupid people. Ok?"

Yusuke nodded. "Ok, Genji-san. I'll need lessons. Are they expensive?" He worried at his lip, small, white teeth showing against his apricot lip.

"Stop that, you'll make it bleed. And it doesn't make any difference how expensive they are. It's for the boss."

"How come you call him ... what was it? Oyabun?"

"Ok, more Japanese lessons. We belong to a ninkyo-dantai ... a chivalrous group. We specialize in protection and services. Like laundry and cleaning services. It is very lucrative ..." at Yusuke's confused expression he explained, "Makes a lot of money. We also import ... stuff. Don't worry about it, just remember, we have plenty of money. We live a simple life here. And you'll be taught to use your magic properly. You never make a big show of it, remember that. Ok?"

Yusuke remembered the minor explosion in the main sitting room when one of the young men had used some sort of spell to light the fire pit in the middle of the room. Three different older men had spent several minutes each bawling him out and he'd gotten a smack in the head from one. But the smack hadn't hurt him much, it hadn't been that hard. It had actually reassured Yusuke a bit. So, now he just said, "Yes, sir, no big show of magic. But why not?" he peeked up at his new father to see if he was mad.

"Because magic is a precious gift and not to be ... flashed around to impress idiots and skirts. Yes?" Musashi was proud of his new son, the boy was bright and inquisitive. He just hoped the kid outgrew his habit of cringing quickly. He was going to have to pass the word on that the boy was his toy-child, and quickly. Otherwise, there was going to be an incident, which he didn't want.

Yusuke nodded his understanding. "Ok, I understand. And ... um ... I was ..." He gulped, obviously gathering his courage for something.

Musashi and Genji both encouraged him with nods and Genji said, "Ask. No one will be angry if you ask a question, unless you ask the same question over and over."

"What if I get a bad grade? Or I do something wrong ... without intending to?"

Musashi answered that one. "You get bad grade you study harder and I watch you. You do bad thing ... we discuss it. You will be punish, but Nihondo do not beat their children. Ok?"

Yusuke wondered for a moment if he'd died, this was way too close to heaven. He shook himself out of his daze when Genji made an inquiring noise. "Oh! Yes, I understand. So." He switched to Japanese, "What would you like me to do to entertain you? I'll have to learn, yes?"

"Yes. I think I'll have you trained as the old samurai were trained. An instrument, calligraphy, flower arrangement, tea ceremony, martial arts ... everything."

Yusuke blinked for a moment then shivered, his life had just changed incredibly. He couldn't help asking, "Won't your real sons be ... I don't know the word. Angry? But not." He frowned a bit.

Genji came to his rescue. "Jealous is the word you want. And, no, they won't. They're older. The youngest of your brothers is 20. They all are involved in the business in one way or another. We discussed it with them before we started looking. They're ok with it. Don't worry."

"Ok. I won't." He changed the subject to one of his desires. This was the test that made or broke this deal for him. "Can I have a sweet? And some tea?"

"Sure, kid." Genji shrugged his shoulders and called, "Kuma-kun, bring tea and some mochi, ok?" he turned to Yusuke to explain. "Kuma is our So-honbucho, so you ask him for anything you want. But remember, he's a very busy man so don't take advantage."



Yusuke dropped any illusion of childishness he'd ever displayed. "Ok. So ... who's who and what do they do." He hoped he wasn't making a mistake, his affected childishness was a shield and a weapon against his abusers, but he was taking things at face value as he couldn't see any reason for these people to haul him half way around the world just to lie to him.

"Ok. I'm Genji Shinichi I'm the wakagashira or first lieutenant to the Oyabun. Second in command. Then there's Nakajima Haruhiro the Saiko-komon. The senior advisor. We're all you really need to worry about. Everyone else is just dumb muscle, wakashu. Our organization is a bit elaborate and confusing. Just remember ... you are the son of the Oyabun, you out rank everyone but me, Kuma and Miyamoto-sama and his sons. And don't you forget it."

Yusuke nodded. "I won't." Kuma returned with tea and sweet bean buns, saying that there was no mochi, but he was sending for some. "Thank you so much, Kuma-kun." He then turned to Musashi. "Sir, that man who tried to kill you ... what was his ... problem?"

"He was mad at me for something he thought I did wrong. I have to thank you for saving me, as he would surely have killed me. But the next time you throw yourself into a blade like that ... I will be greatly displeased."

Yusuke said, wide eyed, "But I couldn't let him hurt you, you're my father. And I've barely gotten to know you."

Genji and Musashi both threw back their heads and laughed heartily. "Hear that? He's barely gotten to know me. Priceless."

Genji nodded, managed to stop laughing and replied, "And his head is as hard as yours. Oh, my belly hurts." He rubbed his stomach which ached from laughing so hard.

Yusuke just sipped his tea and nibbled on a bun. Perhaps this would work out after all.

.

A month went by, and Yusuke was happier than he'd ever been. He was in a cram school to bring his education up to par with his peers, which was very difficult as he had to learn Japanese and Kanji,

Hiragana and Katakana. He'd never heard of a language that had three completely different writing systems. He was struggling with it all.

He also had Koto lessons and martial arts lessons to keep up with, although those teachers came to the compound. He didn't realize that Kuma was teaching him flower arranging by having Yusuke help him with the arrangements that littered the house, every room had at least one. He had also made arrangements for Yusuke to have lessons in tea ceremony after regular school was back in session.

Yusuke was dreading that, as he knew that he was going to be horribly behind and didn't want to embarrass his new father. He tried hard and studied hard. Musashi watched in amazement as the boy quickly cast off his shyness and hesitancy. It was almost like magic. And, in a way, it was; the magic of a young boy taken from a bad situation and placed in one where he was loved, praised and helped. He blossomed like a lotus in the summer heat.

Things never got bad though. Yusuke was a quick study, and enthusiastic about learning everything he could. All the wakashu helped him with things, even sparing with him to help him with his arts. Before he started regular school, he found that he should still be attending the juken three nights a week.

Yusuke liked his Juku and got acquainted with several new friends there. With no Dudley to beat up prospective friends, he was doing fairly well. At least he had been.

Yusuke couldn't believe his headmaster had taken one look at the driver and told him to wait while he wrote a letter. He returned quickly, carrying a letter in one hand and wiping his forehead with the other. His handkerchief was already sweat stained. Yusuke took the envelope in a respectful manner and got into the car.

He refused to ride in the back, saying it made him feel lonely, so he sat in the front seat and examined the envelope until the driver got in.

Yusuke handed the envelope to the driver, who he addressed as 'aniki' or big brother.

"Aniki, what is it?" His bump of curiosity was as big as his head, or so Kuma-kun said.

"I don't know, Otouto, but it's addressed to the oyabun." The wakashu looked worried. If Yusuke-kun had failed something, there was going to be trouble, the cram school was expensive so he shouldn't have.

"I got a bad feeling. I don't know how to say it in Nihondo." Yusuke worried at his lip. He was sure he hadn't failed anything, he'd seen his daily sheet and his daily grades were good. "My ... this..." He pointed to the back of his neck and the driver told him the name. "Yes, thank you. The back of my neck is tickling."

The back of his neck did more than tickle when he gave the letter to his chichi-ue. He watched in dread as the envelope was opened and his fathers face went from calm and serene to furious.

"What is this shit? I pay those fools good money and they tell me to keep you at home because they don't like the driver? What is wrong with them? Are they stupid?" He visibly calmed himself and called Kuma. He tossed the letter at him and said, "Go speak to that man."

Yusuke had been thinking, as soon as he realized that he wasn't in trouble. "Chichi-ue-san, why do I have to go to school at all? In England we have self-study, all you have to do is sign up for it. The student has to take a test at the end of every year to prove that they have done what they should. Do they have that here?" He thought for a moment as his father looked at him in surprise. "Why don't they want me?"

"Because I'm Yakuza. They don't want trouble so they don't want you. And if the cram school doesn't want you, you'll have trouble in day school too." Musashi looked at Yusuke sadly. "I'm sorry, my son. I'll see what I can do about getting you into a boarding school."

Yusuke shook his head. "No! I won't go. If they don't want me, that's their loss. As long as I can pass the yearly tests, no one will care where I'm going to school." He thought about it for a moment. "All you have to do is ... get papers that say there's a school here in the compound. Right?"

"Yes. I think you are right. I'll just hire you tutors."

Yusuke smiled as his father praised him for being so smart. Encouraged by this he made another suggestion. "Why don't we see who can teach me what from the wakashu. There's no sense in paying some smart guy when we've got people here. And that way we don't have to worry about someone coming and going all the time." He peeked at Musashi from under his bangs. "It'll keep the compound more secure."

The compound was over 3,000 years old and had been occupied by the same 'family' all that time. It was actually incorporated as a town. The compound included the family house, a summer kitchen, forge, garage, gardens, dojo and training ground and was actually still walled. Yusuke wasn't to realize until later that it was also hidden by notice-me-not spells and wards. The road down from the valley it was situated in was hidden as well.

And so, Miyamoto Musashi spent some money, called in a few minor favors and got his old-fashioned one room school house accredited. He then searched amongst his men for teachers. He found a calligrapher, a martial arts teacher, an aikido sensei, a sumi-e instructor and several others. He was happy to realize that young Yusuke was a quick study with computers which put him on-line with Tokyo U, where he would study literature, history, math and sciences.

Yusuke settled into a routine that allowed him to get all his studies done and still have time for play, although he did look at his physical training as play. His instructors in martial arts and swordsmanship made it fun. He still wasn't too sure he liked getting up before 7am to run but he was running with his father and Genji and Kuma so he didn't say much.

One day, soon after he started his home schooling, Yusuke approached Musashi with a piece of paper.

"For you, sir."

Musashi took the paper and smiled. It was covered with a writing exercise, just numbers and simple to write words, but it was very well done. He called Kuma in to see it as well as anyone else within the sound of his voice. They all rushed in, shouting, "Yes, Boss. What do you need, Boss." Yusuke thought they all looked extremely funny, but he refrained from laughing at them so as not to hurt

anyone's feelings. He didn't like being laughed at so he tried very hard not to laugh at someone else.

All the aniki admired his kanji, saying he'd done very well for one so young. The paper took pride of place on a bulletin board in the entry way. Yusuke proudly followed his father back into the main sitting room.

"Is it really nice? I hope so, I made my own ink and everything. Is my Nihon getting better? Kuma-kun says it is. I still have to ask for words but not so often now. The teacher at the Juken said I'm really smart and picking up language quickly."

Kuma came in just then with tea and treats. "Oi, slow down. Breathe." He laughed and poured tea.

Musashi chuckled a bit then said, "Oh, let him alone. He makes me laugh. Makes me feel young." He turned to Yusuke. "You're a good boy."

Yusuke sipped at his tea, giving Musashi a side long look. "Thank you." He turned to face the older men more directly. "I learned a joke. Do you want to hear it?"

"Of course." Musashi settled back to laugh at some childish joke or other. He was startled into a real laughing fit as Yusuke told one of the filthiest jokes he'd ever heard. Kuma actually pounded the table. Genji had to lay on his back to catch his breath.

Finally, Genji asked, "Where the hell did you learn that? I'll mangle the bastard."

Yusuke shook his head. "I eaves dropped on the wakashu. Akira told it to Itsuki. What's a geshi?"

It took them a moment to figure out what he was asking. Genji finally said, "Oh, you mean a geisha. That's a lady who entertains men. She sings and dances. She has to know about politics and current affairs as she's expected to make conversation. And she's not a ... Well, she doesn't ..." Genji trailed off, trying to figure out how to explain this to a nine-year-old.

Yusuke glanced at his father who just snorted and said, "Don't look at me, you're too young for that talk." enlightened, Yusuke just said. "Oh, I see. A geisha is a lady who ... like a real escort. She's not a ... can I speak English? I don't know the proper word." Musashi gave permission with a nod. "Whore. I know a lot of swear words. Uncle Vernon never watched his language around me."

Kuma gave his opinion on that, "Well, we're all a bunch of crude bastards around here, but you watch your language in public. Don't swear in front of the little one's or ladies. Ok?"

"Ok." Yusuke settled down to drink tea and eat snacks while listening to the older men discuss business. They figured he wouldn't understand what they were saying, and he figured it was a good way to learn new words. The little sponge sat and soaked up language, attitude and information.

May 5th came and Yusuke was surprised to find that the whole house was decorated with paper carp and dolls. He'd wondered why he was told to get up especially early, and that they wouldn't be running this morning. He put on a yakuta, folded his bed and went to the kitchen for breakfast. He liked eating there in the corner between the engawa doors and one wall.

Kuma welcomed him into the kitchen with a hearty, "Morning. Here, eat. It's Boy's Day and we're going shopping in Sapporo. I'll come in and help you dress. We're all wearing Hakama for the occasion."

Yusuke smiled at this. He'd seen nearly every one in hakama at one point or another. He was still such a low rank in aikido and laido that he hadn't earned a uniform yet. He was hoping to earn one by the time he was eleven. He ate his fish and rice quickly, downed his tea and hurried back to his room.

When Kuma brought the hakama, Yusuke was delighted to see that it wasn't the dark navy blue cotton of a common set. This outfit was made up of a hakama, hakama-shita, and haori and Haori himo, over all he would wear a kamishimo. The hakama-shita and Haori were all made of dark green silk brocade with parts of the brocade pattern outlined with neat hand stitching. The hakama and kamishimo were made of brocade a shade lighter and more heavily embroidered and lined with the stitching color of a delicate yellow. The haori himo was made of the same threads as the stitching. He

blushed a bit as Kuma helped him put on the fundoshi, but was now used to the nudity that no one else thought anything of.

He remembered his first time in the bath. He'd walked in to find everyone naked and standing or sitting around in a medium sized room with drains in the floor. Musashi-san had helped him wash, dumping buckets of warm water over his head to wash off the soap. Then they'd gone into the baths themselves. The huge tub had already been occupied by several men who'd stood up and bowed without embarrassment. They'd all settled into the warm water and Yusuke had been delighted with the colorful tattoos that many of the men had.

"Yusuke, pay attention. Lift your foot so I can put on your tabi." Kuma poked the boy in the ribs, making him giggle. He often zoned out, but it didn't seem dangerous so no one said much. Kuma thought the boy was just organizing his thoughts and said so.

"I'm sorry, Kuma-kun. I was thinking. How old do I have to be to get a tattoo? I want a fish ... and a dragon ... and peonies." He examined the white tabi with interest then eyed the geta doubtfully. "Are you sure I can walk in those?"

Kuma laughed easily. "Yes, they're easy to walk in. So. Don't worry, we'll all be right there anyway. As to tattoo's, I don't know. We'll ask the Oyabun first then check things out. Now." Kuma stood up, towering over the boy. "We better get going."

It didn't take long for Kuma to get Yusuke into the clothing as he obediently held still, turned and held up his arms. Kuma smoothed the last wrinkle out of the front of the kamishimo, checking to make sure the mon lined up.

"There. Now we'll go so we can watch the Oyabun put up the koinobori, the flags. They're shaped like fish and show our pride in having a son in the house. There will be one for each of the sons of the house and a special larger one just for you because you're living in the house. Let's go."

Yusuke was delighted at this and hurried to follow Kuma. He was greeted at the front door by Musashi, who helped him put on his geta. They matched in what they were wearing in that they were wearing the same outfit, but Musashi's was in bronze and green. All

the wakashu who were to accompany them were also dressed in hakama in dark shades with the mon of the house on the back.

Musashi stepped back and examined his toy child with pleasure. "You look very nice. But that hair. Did you brush it?"

Yusuke tried to flatten one of his wild locks of hair. "Yes, sir, but it won't lay down. One of the wakashu let me use some stuff when we were in England, remember? I've been using it a lot, but Kuma said that I shouldn't for today. I'm sorry it looks so messy."

"Ha, well. Never mind then. I think you'll enjoy the day I have planned." Musashi nodded to Kuma. "A word." Kuma stepped away with his oyabun. "Whoever it was who gave Yusuke his wax, give them some sort of reward. Ok?"

"All ready did, boss. He's taking over a small route from one of the older men who wants to retire. He's doing good. But we need to talk about the laundry and protection later. Things aren't going that well"

"Ok. Get me a report and we'll talk. Tomorrow."

Yusuke waited patiently while his father and Kuma talked. He knew it was worrisome, as they both had lines between their eyes that said they were concerned about something. He decided to let it go for now, but he was going to help fix whatever was wrong. He didn't like it when his father wasn't happy.

Musashi took Yusuke to the main gate of the compound and raised the koinobori, one for each of his sons, situated below the large red one that symbolized himself. Then he raised the large blue one that was for Yusuke, explaining everything as he went.

Finally he said, "There. Now we'll walk down to the helicopter pad and fly to Sapporo to shop. Do you know what you want? It's traditional in this family to buy something for schooling on this day. And sweets."

Yusuke grinned. "Yes, I know what I want. I've been using Hanabi's calligraphy set. I want one of my own. It's getting inconvenient for Hanabi-san. I don't like taking advantage. And I want chocolate, please. I never got any Before." Everyone noticed how Yusuke



seemed to capitalize before when talking about the days before he'd come to Japan.

"That's fine. A very good idea too. You do need your own stuff. I'll send Kuma to a good book store while we're there, and have him buy you more school supplies. Now." They'd reached the helicopter now, and Yusuke submitted to being lifted into the chopper.

He was pleased to get a window seat, and spent the flight looking down on the landscape and asking questions.

Now he knew why they'd gotten up so early, it was an hour and a half flight to Sapporo. They lived on the other side of Hokkaido, between Mt. Higashi-Mikuni and Mt. Kito-Ushi. He found out that the Miyamoto-gumi owned an entire valley outright, and possessed logging rights to several miles on every side of it. Their land was in a 'protectorate' designated as a renewable resource logging area. Since they used renewable resource methods, they were within their rights to forbid camping, hiking and other trespass. This enabled them to keep out tourists and pleasure seekers due to the dangers of logging. Yusuke found out that they had a lease on what they didn't own that didn't expire until sometime next century. Musashi-san told him that the land had belonged to the family since the 1200's. He was very proud of the fact that they actually did conserve the area. Some of the old growth forests hadn't been logged off in three hundred years or more.

When they landed at Sapporo, a car was waiting for them. The drive into the center of the city took only a few minutes and they were soon getting out at the main headquarters of the Miyamoto-gumi. Yusuke was disturbed to see that passersby glared at them, not all but a great many. He wondered what that was about.

He sighed, then had a sudden idea pop into his head. "Otousan, where was I going to go to school? And how was I going to get there?"

'You remember seeing that big yellow brick building near the juken? That's where. And you were going to get there the same way you got to the juken. Take a trip through the fire to the local headquarters, and a car from there. Ok?"

"Yes, sir. But ... if I can fire travel, why can't a tutor?" Yusuke didn't know how most of this magic stuff worked yet, but he was determined to figure it out.

"The ones who are magical can, the rest ... most of them are scared of magic. That's why we keep it to ourselves. No sense in causing them, or ourselves, trouble that isn't necessary. Now. We'll just walk around a bit and window shop." As they walked Musashi told Yusuke about the area.

Finally, one dirty look too many had Yusuke asking, "Otousan, why do all those people look at us that way?"

"What way?" Musashi looked around quickly.

"Like the Dursleys used to look at me. Like we did something really bad. Why?" Yusuke wanted to understand his new home quickly so he could help his father. He already loved the man for his gentle smiles and kind touch.

Musashi scowled at a younger man who was looking at them in a way he didn't like. The man scurried away quickly. "Some people feel that we are ... an encumbrance to society. We don't fit in." He glanced around. "Sometimes people are cruel. We greet that cruelty with equal measure. Just remember ... You are a Miyamoto. You deserve respect, demand it if you have to. Do not ever bow your neck to anyone ...except me." He smiled down at his newest child, and was pleased to see a hard light in those eloquent green eyes.

"I won't, Otousan. I'll make you proud of me. I promise."

They were all a bit startled by the soft, golden glow that surrounded the boy for a moment. At Miyamoto's raised eyebrow, Yusuke just shrugged and walked on. No one was quite sure what to make of that, but they'd find out in time, or the boss would, he always did. And no one was about to upset the small boy, they didn't want to lose a finger over a glow.

Yusuke looked into windows and examined points of interest for a few hundred yards, then he asked, "Otousan, why did we take a chopper if we could have come by fire travel?"

"I wanted you to see where we live. I want you to understand why we do some things the way we do. Didn't you like it?" Musashi worried that Yusuke had been air sick or frightened.

"Oh, no, Otousan, I really liked it. I was just curious. If you don't like me asking questions, I'll stop." He nibbled at his lip, looking at his father through his bangs. He hoped he hadn't made him angry. Vernon had always hit him for asking questions. Not usually more than a slap, but even that was to be avoided from such a big man.

"I'm not angry, You're welcome to ask any question you like. I might not answer, though. I was just hoping that you weren't sick or scared." Musashi smiled gently at his son.

"Oh, ok. No, I wasn't. I really liked it. It was fun. I've always dreamed of flying." Yusuke extended his arms to the side, and ran in a small circle. People nearby smiled at this while all the wakashu beamed. This was the first time he'd done anything child like.

"Ah! Don't we all." Musashi smiled again.

All the wakashu responded to this by saying loudly, "Yes, yes, so true, boss." Yusuke looked around for a second, then dismissed this oddity as just the way things were.

Yusuke eyed the way they were dressed and the way other boys were dressed and realized that his clothing was much more expensive than anyone else's. He filed this away for later.

Now, he wanted a few things. "Otousan, I want to go to that book store and look for some manga. May I?"

"Yes, we'll all go. What are you interested in?" Musashi led the way.

Yusuke scampered after him happily chattering away. "I want the first book in Yu-yu Hakusho, Inuyasha and Ruroni Kinshin. They all look so interesting and exciting. And, teacher said, they're about my level. He said I'm a very quick study. I'm already reading above my age group." He skipped over the threshold, thanking the wakashu who held the door. "Thank you. So, I was thinking, I could practice my reading on something fun. Yes? And kanji is easier to read than English. I think it's because a kanji is a kanji. It can only mean one thing. English has words that look alike but mean different things.

And hiragana and katakana are fun too. But my calligraphy is bad. Teacher got on me for not writing them in the right stroke order."

Yusuke abandoned the conversation for the moment and headed for the shelves.

While he was looking over the offerings, Miyamoto called, "Nomura-kun, what has he been reading?"

Nomura wasn't sure if he was in trouble or not but he bravely stood forward and bowed. Then he explained, "The manga he mentioned and a bit of Fruits Basket, just whatever was laying around that was what I felt was appropriate. Nothing I wouldn't let my own cousin read. I kept the nasty stuff away from him. And a damn hard job that was, too. Some idiots thought it would be funny for him to get ahold of some hentai stuff. I beat them up. He's really very good about stuff, but ... Boss, he's got a streak of stubbornness that ... I really wouldn't like to get on the wrong side of him once he's older."

"Thank you for taking care of him. Kuma-san, see that he gets a proper reward."

Kuma just nodded. "Sure thing, boss."

Part of this chapter seems a bit scattered but it's that way because there's no way to organize it, everything is happening all at once.

.

They were to find out about Yusuke's temper sooner than they expected.

Yusuke's pipping voice echoed around the suddenly silent bookshop.

"I don't care what you want. I want that book and you took it right out of my hand. That's not nice. You're bigger than I am." Yusuke refused to jump for the book like the older, bigger boy wanted. Instead, he kicked the boy on the shin and, when he bent over, tried to punch him in the face.

"Yusuke! Yamero!"

Yusuke turned his head in startlement. "Sir?" He glowered slightly before he could smooth his expression out.

Musashi didn't take offense at that, he just said mildly, "Never punch someone with your thumb like that and never in the face. There's too much bone, you'll hurt your hand." Musashi hurried to Yusuke. "Here. Like this." He arranged the small fingers into an effective fist and patted him on the shoulder. "There. Now." He pinned the older boy, who was around seventeen or so, with a look that nearly released the boys bladder. "You will let him test himself. Yes?"

Yusuke didn't waste any time in punching the boy in the stomach.

He 'oof-ed' and it wasn't all for show. Yusuke was quite strong for his size, especially as he was now well nourished. The kid had quite a punch for his size.

Miyamoto looked at the boy, one eyebrow raised slightly, and said, "You know who I am." It wasn't a question.

The boy nodded then fled before something bad happened. He vowed to change his ways. He didn't need another run in with some mini-yakuza.

Yusuke looked up at his Otousan. "Did I do ok? I ... I liked hitting him. He was a bully and I hate bullies. My mother's sister's son is really mean. He was mean to me. I want to get good at fighting so no one will bully me again." His expression was a little bit less than innocent.

Musashi replied to this mildly. "The word you want is cousin. I'll make sure you can fight. That's what the martial art classes are for. But, you mustn't fight just because you can. You have to have a reason. OK?"

"Yes, Otousan. I understand. Thank you for teaching me to punch properly." He turned his attention to his book, satisfied that he hadn't disappointed his father. "I like this. Can I have a few more? There's a lot, so maybe only the next two?" He turned to the shelves to select another book

The second his back was turned Miyamoto signaled one of the wakashu. The man hurried over, bowing several times and exclaiming, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir. What do you need, sir?"

"Yusuke likes these three manga. Buy them all and take them to the chopper. Here's a credit card, return it to me as soon as you've paid. Go."

The man hurried off after bowing several more times. He took a moment to wipe his brow, the second he'd been summoned he'd started to sweat. It was usually not good to attract the oyabun's attention when they were out and about.

Yusuke approached Musashi and said, respectfully, "Otousan, I need some money to pay for these."

"Ah! The first lesson in being a Miyamoto. You don't pay for things. I'll give you some money but here's how you do it." Musashi displayed all the casual arrogance of an oyabun.

Musashi gave Yusuke a handful of bills. "Now, you call someone over, give them the money and have them pay. Do it."

Yusuke glanced around, found a younger man and called, "You! Come here. Pay for these." He shoved the bills and books at the man, who grabbed them quickly. He bowed, knowing quite well that

this young boy carried all the power of the Miyamoto family on his shoulders, and took himself off to the checkout to pay.

When the man returned, he gave Yusuke the change but kept the package of books. Yusuke nodded but didn't thank the man as he hadn't been told to. However, he did see the pleased expression his simple nod had brought to the man's face. He copied the tilt of Miyamoto's head to a T.

He spent a few moments thinking about this then tugged at Musashi's hand. "Otousan, why don't you thank your employees? Isn't it rude?"

"No. They're not employees. They're ... wakashu. They're like apprentices." He had to take time to explain that word. "I don't thank them because everything they do is a learning experience. They actually should be thanking me." Again, his casual arrogance made an appearance.

Yusuke looked thoughtful for a moment then said, "Ok, but ... aren't I a student too?"

"Yes, but you are also my son. My toy child. They'll take their lives in their hands if they don't show you proper respect. Remember that." His smile would have scared a shark.

Yusuke nodded, smiled back and walked toward the door. He still needed to find a calligraphy set. He nodded absently to the wakashu who opened the door. Miyamoto-san smirked slightly, the boy was learning quickly and this pleased him. He was looking forward to all his other sons meeting this one for the first time.

They ambled down the street, following one of the wakashu who knew where the small square called Shodo Place was. He quickly led them into the square and the wakashu took up positions where they could see all the entrances to it as well as all the shop doors.

Yusuke took note of this but didn't ask questions. He knew that either Kuma-kun or Hoshiyo-kun would explain things. Right now all he wanted to do was enjoy the day and his shopping. He was well aware, from things the wakashu let drop, that this was an unusual treat.

He pointed to a store and asked, "Is that the ink store? I think I read the kanji right."

Musashi nodded absently, eyes on someone in the near distance. "Yes, go in and get two sticks. One of vegetable oil and one of pine. Get good quality, there's no sense in getting something cheap."

"Ok, do you want one of the wakashu to come with me? I'd like Hoshiyo-kun, please." Yusuke started for the store, assuming that his father would assign the appropriate person.

At a nod of the oyabun's head, Hoshiyo followed the small boy. He made a note to remind the oyabun that something needed to be done about the boy's stunted growth.

Yusuke smiled a bit when the shop owner came out at the tinkle of the little bell. The man glanced around then down to see him standing in front of Hoshiyo.

"Yes? May I help you?" the shop keeper minded his manners carefully. Hoshiyo looked like exactly what he was, a mid-level yakuza. He wasn't dumb muscle but he surely wasn't a higher up, like a Saiko-komon. Hoshiyo just pointed to Yusuke and stood with his heel's against the door.

"I need two ink sticks of good quality. One pine soot, one vegetable oil. My father said to get good quality. What would you suggest?"

The clerk was called and the shopkeeper returned to the back. Yusuke noticed this but didn't comment on it as he didn't like the way the older man looked at him. The younger clerk was more pleasant.

"Ok, one oil and one pine ink stick coming right up. There's a nice student set, one of each, right here. They're not top quality but quite good for someone as young as you. They grind nicely and make a good ink. Here ... smell this." He held out one stick for Yusuke.

Yusuke obediently smelled it. "It smells like burnt wood."

"That's right and you should notice a hint of the pine it's made from. Now smell this one." He held out the other.



Again, Yusuke smelled it. "Mmmm. It smells of oil."

"Very good. And you'll notice that it smells of clean oil. If the stick smells rancid, don't buy it. This set of sticks is very good. But ..." he stopped speaking as he fished around in the display case for a different box. "this set is better. It's a bit expensive but the sticks are very dense and will last a long time. You actually get better value for your money."

Yusuke waited while the clerk put the box on the counter top then reached up to pick up one of the sticks. It was heavier than it seemed it should be. He smelled it and it smelled nice, burnt pine and something else. He looked up at the clerk who smiled and said, "Binder." Yusuke said, "Ah." and went back to his examination.

He finally decided to take the more expensive set and put the sticks back into their box. He pushed it across the counter to the clerk then said, "Hoshiyo-kun, if you would." and went to the door.

Hoshiyo smiled to himself, young Yusuke was already acquiring the mannerisms of a yakuza Kyou dai or elder brother. He just said, "Ok, Aniki, I got it." He paid the now round eyed clerk and ambled out after Yusuke, smiling to himself.

Yusuke didn't pay much attention to Hoshiyo-kun calling him elder brother or uncle, he'd heard most of the wakashu call one of the higher up's that, no matter their age. He just took it as politeness and went about his business.

This business was to find brushes of his own, which he found out that his father had done for him. His father just handed him a box containing a free standing, circular rack that held 64 brushes. Musashi thought this was particularly lucky, as it was eight times eight. Yusuke bowed and thanked his father happily.

"Now, paper. Lots and lots of paper. All kinds. Please?" Yusuke tried 'begging eyes' on his father and got a gentle swat on the head. The first time Musashi had done this Yusuke had cringed to the floor, but several more times and he realized that the gentle pat was all he was ever going to get.

It had hurt Musashi's heart to do that, but Yusuke couldn't be allowed to live in terror of a raised hand. The constant touching and the sight of wakashu getting a smack finally cured him of his fears.

Now, after the swat that made Yusuke giggle a bit, Musashi replied, "Yes, you ..." He chuckled and finished, "Ouji-chan." Yusuke eyed him for a second, knowing that something was going on but not sure what. The wakashu snickered amongst themselves, little prince indeed.

They went to the paper store where Yusuke got a quick education in the different types of paper and what he could expect from each one and what it was best used for. He bought two sheets of each kind and let a wakashu take the roll and pay for it.

Yusuke skipped a bit as they left the square, causing the wakashu to smile. "Now I can learn to write all my names."

"All your names?" Musashi watched in pleasure as his new son beamed in happiness.

"Yes. All my names. Miyamoto Yusuke, Harry Potter, Ouji-chan. I've got so many nice names. It's not like There where I only had boy, stupid and dumb fuck. Oh, and freak. I don't want to learn to write them." He skipped again to keep up with his father's longer legs.

The wakashu cringed at Yusuke's words. Miyamoto-san looked like he wanted to shoot someone. They all hoped he got over it soon. Kuma resolved to find out what had happened to the Dursleys, just in case his oyabun got an idea.

The oyabun said that torture was like hunting with a flamethrower, it doesn't work and makes a mess. However, the threat of torture worked wonders on certain types of people. He also said that there were exceptions to every rule. Kuma hoped that Vernon Dursley was an exception.

They walked a bit more, until they came to an ice cream shop. Yusuke was delighted when he was allowed to pick what he wanted. He wound up with a huge sundae that one of the wakashu scorned as 'girly'. Yusuke just shrugged then remarked, "I never got any Before so shut up." He then turned to his ice cream, ignoring the

man completely. Miyamoto just glowered at the man until he began to sweat.

After ice cream, Yusuke found that his father was giving him a wonderful gift. A ring. But not just any ring, a magical one. Kuma explained, in English to make sure that Yusuke understood, that Japanese people didn't use wands like the Westerners did. He called them gaijin in a scornful tone. Japanese people used two things, rings and Ofuda which were paper slips with kanji written on them. These had to be charged and that was the true test of a wizard in Japan. Some wizards could just barely make a ring work, or an ofuda; others could conjure a ward with a wave of a hand and a toss of a bit of paper. Others depended on omamori made by a Shinto priest. An omamori, Yusuke found out, was a silk brocade tag, like a western luggage tag, that contained an ofuda made of wood, stone or even metal, blessed by a Shinto priest and sold at a temple. They could also be made by any wizard with the power to do it. Yusuke vowed to learn how to make both.

"Otousan, will I be powerful? Or just a ... common wizard?"

Yusuke worried about that while Musashi waved a hand over his head for a moment. No one was much surprised when a kanji appeared over his head. It said that he would be very powerful.

"You'll be a great wizard in time. Now, we have to get you your ring. Come." Musashi held out his hand to Yusuke, when Yusuke took it he turned and led the way to the square where wizards did their magical business.

They went straight to a shop, which sold magical rings and other foci. Yusuke looked around with interest. There were all sorts of rings in display cases, as well as bracelets and hair pins. He also saw things he didn't recognize at all. His father called his attention to the rings.

"I think a ring. At least for now." He helped Yusuke sit on a tall stool. "Hold your hand over this and see if anything happens. Don't worry if nothing does, there are lots of things to choose from. Your magic will do most of the work."

Yusuke did as he was told but nothing happened. He was a bit disappointed but, after seeing several more trays, kept a hopeful expression on his face and tried again.

It took three trays before anything happened then a gold ring glowed faintly. Yusuke looked at it with interest. The jeweler took the plain gold ring out of the tray and put it on a velvet cushion, saying, "Well, that was a bit half hearted. Let's try some more." He got out another tray and they continued to test for reaction. Finally, another ring glowed brightly. "Ah! Much better. Let's see..."

Yusuke decided he liked the ring and hoped he got to keep it. It was made of gold in the form of a stick of bamboo that wrapped around into a circle, a few bits of jade formed leaf like shapes. It was also engraved with kanji that he couldn't read yet.

The jeweler put both rings on his cushion and had Yusuke hold his hand over them. The second ring glowed more brightly than the first but Musashi decided that they'd take both. The jeweler took the rings and did something to the inner side then handed them to Yusuke. He instructed the boy to put one on a finger of each hand. When Yusuke asked which hand, the jeweler said whichever one felt best.

Yusuke put one ring on the middle finger of his right hand and one on the ring finger of his left. It didn't feel right so he switched the rings to different fingers which felt a little better. When he switched the rings to the opposite hands he felt something sort of snap into place. "Oh! I felt something. It's really odd."

The jeweler grinned until his cheeks nearly split. "Oh, yes. This one is powerful. I even felt him bond with his rings. Excellent."

Musashi patted Yusuke on the shoulder, paid for the rings, lifted him down from the high stool and led him out.

He stopped at the bench in the center of the square and sat down. Yusuke stood in front of him at his motion.

"Now, my son, I want a few words with you. You are not to use magic for just anything. Magic is serious business and it's easy to have an accident. Intent is ... all. If you intend harm, harm will be done. If you intend good then good will be done. Every wakashu, shatei and kyōdai will help you with anything you ask. But ... if I find you are pranking anyone, there will be consequences and you won't like them. Yes?" Musashi gave Yusuke a stern look.

"Yes, sir. I understand. I'll be good. And careful. Is there anything that I shouldn't try to learn?" Yusuke was thrilled that he was allowed to learn magic and didn't want to do anything to get the privilege taken away.

"No, but there will be things that you are not old enough to do. If you try something and have a bad result, stop trying until later. And never, ever try anything new without a kyōdai around and preferably a powerful one. I'll introduce you to the best teachers in the gumi, listen to them. Ok?"

"Yes, sir. I promise. Now, can I have more ice cream?" Yusuke decided that there had been enough seriousness for a while and returned his attention to the more important things.

Musashi threw his head back and laughed. "Yes, you may." He just motioned to a wakashu who hurried off to acquire the treats.

While they waited, Musashi told Yusuke that he had a great surprise for him. "You like to fly? Yes?" Yusuke nodded, wondering how magic could allow him to fly. "I have gotten you an oar.

Just like Botan has in Yu-yu Hakasho. I'll have you taught to fly. How would you like that?"

Yusuke's reaction was all that his father could have wished. Yusuke crowed with delight and jumped up and down. "Yes! I get to fly! Thank you so much." Yusuke hugged Musashi around the waist.

Musashi just patted his shoulder and looked embarrassed at his exuberance. "Well. I'm glad you're happy. Now. Eat your treat then we'll walk around a bit more."

.

They spent the rest of the morning just wandering around the magical market of Sapporo, looking in windows and visiting. Musashi did one bit of business that made Yusuke stare.

He stopped at a shop and spoke to a man. He kept his voice soft and his expression mild but Yusuke saw the look in Musashi's eyes, it wasn't pleasant. The shop person went inside and came out with a

package which he gave to Miyamoto with a curt bow. The return bow was just short of non-existent. Yusuke wondered what it was all about but dismissed it as 'ask about later'. He was impressed with his father's methods and vowed to learn them.

He saw a tiny shop, barely wider than it's door and tugged Hoshiyo toward it. "I want to go in there. What's in here?" He looked around the shop, which was filled with all sorts of decorative papers cut into squares of various sizes and books with funny illustrations on the covers.

Nomura smiled down at his young boss's up turned face. "It's an origami shop. Origami is the art of making things out of folded paper. Here, you, show him."

The shop keeper was an older lady who just snorted at Nomura's rudeness then quickly folded a piece of paper in to a swan then waved her hand to make it swim across the counter top.

Yusuke's wide eyes and awed expression won her over at once. "Oh! Teach me that! Please? I'm sorry to be so rude."

His look made her snort again. "I was a Mama-san when I was young and beautiful. I'm used to his sort." she then started pilling things on the counter, telling him, "You want to learn, the first thing you have to do is learn to fold properly. A badly folded creature won't take a spell worth spit. Now ... after you learn the simple things, take them to someone who knows how to spell them or get back here to me and I'll teach you. These two books are a good start and more than most ever learn. And I'm putting in plenty of papers. Do not refold one if you make a mistake, it won't do well. So." she smiled at Yusuke when he jerked his head at his companion and said, "Hoshiyo-kun, if you would." and just expected him to take care of things.

Hoshiyo just chuckled a bit and said, "Sure thing, Oujisan." he grinned at the old lady's expression and said, "Miyamoto's toy child." then paid and left.

The old lady followed them with her eyes and wondered at the green eyed, messy haired boy. He was already acquiring all the mannerisms of a yakuza top dog.

Lunch was a happy affair, held at one of the best restaurants in Sapporo. Musashi had ordered a Grand Banquet in the Benni-hanna. Yusuke was very interested in all the tricks the chief did, especially any with a knife. He was learning how to throw sharps and seemed to have a real eye for it.

They spent the afternoon window shopping, with an occasional purchase. Musashi spoke to a few people, stern expression firmly in place and actually scolded some man for attempting to touch Yusuke. Yusuke smirked at the man from behind his father then smiled up at him.

.

When they got back to the compound, Musashi didn't waste much time in showing Yusuke his oar.

"Now, you are not to fly unless Kuma or Nakajima is with you. They are both very good flyers. I will take your oar if I catch you flying alone." He grimaced. "And don't ask me to fly with you. I'm no good at it and really don't like it. Understand?"

Yusuke nodded. "Yes, Otousan, I understand. When can I have my first lesson? And ... could I just ... sit on it? Please?"

Musashi, realizing that dangling the oar in front of Yusuke like that without letting him try it out wasn't very nice, said, "You may sit on it and hover. If you can get it to rise to your hand."

Yusuke held his hand over the oar and said, "Rise." the oar rose into his hand like he'd been flying all his life. He sat on the oar, sidesaddle, like he'd seen Botan in the manga do. Several wakashu chuckled a bit at that but it was all good natured. Musashi corrected him and got him settled on the oar. Yusuke grinned happily as he hovered at head height.

After several minutes, he eased back down to the ground and gave his oar to a nearby wakashu. "Take care of that for me. I'm not sure where it should be but put it away properly." then he went into the house to put away the rest of his purchases.

Miyamoto Musashi smiled after him. "The gods picked well. He's settling in just fine. And picking up the proper way of things." All the wakashu, kyōdai and shatei agreed, loudly.

A week later Yusuke brought a well folded butterfly to Genji Shinichi. "Genji-san, will you show me how to make the wings flutter and have it fly? Please?"

"Sure, Oujisan, give it here." Yusuke handed over the origami and watched as his friend spelled it. It fluttered its wings and flew around a bit then came back to settle in Genji-san's hand. "Now, here's how you do it. It's not hard, just the will and the way. You know what you want to do, just tell your magic to do it. Don't try to force it, that'll make a mess." Any one who knew the yakuza would have been surprised. Genji's scarred face usually bore an expression of disdainful contempt. Now it was animated, smiling softly at the youngster he was teaching.

Yusuke wasn't sure exactly what Genji-san meant but he thought about having the wings flutter, he was very pleased when they started to flutter. Then he thought about the butterfly rising up and landing on Genji-san's head. They were both delighted when it did exactly that.

"Very good. Excellent. I have to go tell the boss."

Genji started to get up but Yusuke cried out, "Oh, no! You can't! Please, I want to surprise him ... when I get it all right. I want to make a swarm of butterflies and a flower."

Genji nodded, "Ok, Oujisan, I won't spoil your surprise. Why don't you tell me exactly what you want to do and I'll try to help you with it." He patted Yusuke on the shoulder, making the boy grin back.

"Ok."

They worked on the entertainment for an hour, until Yusuke had to go study, and again later.

Yusuke knew that he was supposed to entertain his father and, wisely, decided that he needed to find out what he found funny, what music he enjoyed and so on. He was thankful that, now that he was being tutored, he had plenty of free time. He never realized that his



music lessons and other lessons in how to entertain were part of his education.

He sat down, his first thing to think about was a schedule so he could do everything he wanted to. This was one thing he'd learned, as soon as he could reason things out. If he had a schedule, even just in his head, he was organized and able to keep up. He even spoke to Genji-san and Kuma-kun about making sure he got all his studies done and chores completed in time to have some fun. He included practice on musical instruments, origami, sumi-e and calligraphy. He didn't think anything of such a busy schedule, as all the kids in juken had complained about how busy they were and how hard they studied. Japan had a completely different attitude to studying than other places, they expected their children to be busy and study hard. This pleased Yusuke a great deal. When he was Harry, he'd had to make sure Dudley always got better grades, now, reborn as Yusuke, he could learn to his heart's content.

.

This evening, Yusuke was going to try his origami display for Musashi. He was a little bit nervous but the times he'd tried it, it had turned out very well. Genji-san was pleased with his performance so tonight was the night.

After they'd eaten a wonderful meal prepared by Kuma-kun, Yusuke settled in the place a wakashu had setup for him. The koto player started playing and Yusuke started folding. First he folded a flower out of three sheets of pink paper supported on a neatly folded upside down flower basket. Then he folded several butterflies that he dropped into his lap, one by one. A quick flick of his wrist sent them fluttering from his lap to fly around the flower for a moment then settle on it, wings still moving gently. All this neatly synchronized with the music the koto was playing.

Everyone clapped their hands, exclaiming in pleasure at the entertainment. Yusuke bowed, smiling widely.

"Thank you, Yusuke, that was very entertaining. Most pleasurable." Musashi smiled at Yusuke. "How are your studies coming?"

"Very well, Otousan. I am learning grass script. I like it. It's very pretty. And Sensei says that I can start using a modern pen, now

that I have mastered a brush. As well as anyone my age can, that is. He's very pleased with me."

"Good, good. Now, be a good boy and be quiet while we discuss some business. Ok?" Musashi didn't see anything wrong with letting Yusuke sit in on business. He'd brought all his sons into the business in this way.

So Yusuke settled next to his father to listen. He'd done this several other times and enjoyed it. He had listened to Vernon hold 'court' with Petunia, explaining various things going on at Grunnings. Yusuke never understood how a man who was so good at getting the best out of his workers at the factory and so good with contracts and such could be such an idiot at home. It completely baffled him. He'd learned a lot from his eavesdropping.

Now, eavesdropping brought him bolt upright. He exclaimed, "But, if you don't allow ... I mean." He glanced around at the kaikei and the shinsiin sitting around the table. One of them scowled at him but Miyamoto glared back at him then turned to Yusuke and asked, "What were you going to say, my son?"

"I'm sorry I interrupted." He bowed from a seated position to the man he'd cut off. "But, if I understand right, you're charging for a service but not providing it. That doesn't make sense, what with the prices you're charging. Just provide the service, cut your charges by ten percent and live with it. Also, hire some people to run the ... what did you call it? The laundry thing. People who know what they're doing and will do it right. No laziness. Perhaps hire some of the older wakashu who want to retire and can't afford to." Yusuke glanced at his father for some sign of approval.

He got more than that. No one realized it but Yusuke was now ten years old as his July 31st birthday had passed without recognition, Yusuke wasn't even aware that it was his birthday. So now, the great hidden Oyabun of the Miyamoto-gumi of the Yamaguchi yakuza turned one of his minor, local businesses over to his ten year old toy child.

He simply shrugged elegantly and said, "Yusuke-kun, you run it. I'll assign Nomura-san to you as primary, he'll be your wakagashira. You give orders, he'll see that they're carried out." He glanced at the men who had displeased him from under his eyelashes, they all

looked extremely put out. He also noticed that Yusuke was drooping a bit. "You look tired. Go to your room and rest, on your way, send Genji-san to me. He's on the engawa as he can't stand this bunch."

"Yes, father. Good night, sir." Yusuke got up, bowed and left to find Genji.

Genji laughed his ass off for about three minutes then got up to go inside, saying, "You got it, little boss."

Yusuke decided that all adults were crazy in one way or another and went to his room. He put his futon out and covered it with his sheets and heavy kakibuton or comforter. He put his desk out and settled sizu on the bed to work on his lessons. He decided not to risk staining his bedding with ink by doing any writing with a brush so he got out a work book and a pen and worked on stroke order instead.

.

A few days after he was appointed the new supervisor of White Flower Laundry, Yusuke showed up at the factory to see what was wrong there.

He walked in wearing a pair of chino cargo pants, a plain green t-shirt and trainers. He was accompanied by a kaikei, or accountant, a shinsiiin, or lawyer and two kyōdai. Nomura backed him up with a grim face and body guard stance. One kyōdai stayed with the accountant and the other with the lawyer.

Yusuke wandered around the plant with Nomura-san by his side. He asked questions in his little boy voice but they were insightful and intelligent. No one realized that he had practically run the Dursley household by himself from the time he was old enough to stand up. But everyone he spoke to remarked later on his shrewd gaze and politeness.

Yusuke had learned Before that politeness got him more than being rude. Dudley would demand things in the store and stomp his feet and scream. Petunia would usually grudgingly buy him something but polite little Harry, standing peacefully off to the side was almost always rewarded by a bystander with money, treats or at least a remark on how nice he was being.

So, he approached a man and asked, "Excuse me. Why aren't you using that machine?"

The worker glanced at the mangle and said, "The mangle? It's broken, has been for months. We really need it too. It makes washing the big stuff like sheets and big table cloths easier but the boss won't fix it."

Yusuke looked at the ferocious looking machine then at Nomura. "Get it fixed." Nomura just made a note in his day planner. "On it, boss." he didn't know how or who but he was sure that someone in the front office knew.

While Yusuke had been wandering around in the factory, hearing tales of woe; from broken essential machinery to under staffing, the lawyer and accountant had been examining the books and contracts stored in the manager's office.

The manager was old school, in that he was liable to cheat on his kick backs, payments to the bosses, and also skimmed off way too much of the profits. He also skimmed on necessary repairs and managed to alienate most of the people he provided services to. Since he'd taken over, the business had lost 30 percent of it's customers and 50 percent of it's profits. The customers who hadn't just refused to remain with the service were holding out on their payments.

Then Yusuke showed that he held a maturity beyond his years by turning to the accountant and lawyer and asking, "Ok, now what? I know what I want to do but not how."

Their best idea was to dismiss the manager and put the assistant in his place, fix the machinery and send a few kyōdai out to speak to the customers. Yusuke agreed but insisted that the kyōdai apologize for any misunderstanding between the company and them and make things right. Then they were to get proper laundry at a ten percent discount for six months. He also said that the customer was to be told that, if they had any other problems, they could come to him personally.

Yusuke then made arrangements with the lawyer to take appointments in his name. He found out that he actually had an office in the local headquarters. And in the main headquarters in

Sapporo. He was a bit disgusted to realize that the only time he had to take appointments was on Saturday mornings.

Yusuke now added appointments with dissatisfied customers to his schedule. It did help that, in an emergency, he could tell a tutor that he had such an appointment and put off a lesson until later. He knew quite well that it wasn't a good idea to do this for no reason.

And so, Miyamoto Yusuke started his first business.

.

This business led to the first heart break of his young life. He sent Hoshiyo to collect his cut about six months after he took over and the new manager took exception to something. His body was apparated back to the compound and landed on the engawa with a thump.

Yusuke, at nearly eleven, took one look and shouted for his father.

Miyamoto-san arrived at a run, his yukata off one shoulder. "What is it?" then he saw the body. "Son of a bitch! Yusuke, go to your room. You don't need to deal with this sort of mess yet. Scat!"

Yusuke scatted obediently. He really didn't want to see his friend covered with blood and sprawled over the apparition point on the engawa. He tossed a zabuton on the floor and knelt on it. He ran through a meditation technique that one of his teachers had taught him to calm down then he thought about what they should do. He was still included in business meetings and eavesdropped shamelessly whenever he could. He had some ideas but he decided to wait until his father and oyabun discussed this with his advisors. The saiko-komon would all be summoned over this, he was sure of that.

He was right, Miyamoto-sama called every saiko-komon and Shateigashira in the Miyamoto-gumi. He gave careful, soft voiced instructions then hung up. He was beyond angry. No one – no one messed with what was his. Not if they wanted to remain healthy. He had 'retired' to this valley to enjoy life after 60 years of managing the Hidden-gumi. His sons now ran it.

They were the people who backed the people who ran the Yamaguchi yakuza. Some people called them ninja. This made him laugh. Ninja! Really. But, if it helped people understand what they really were, he didn't care what they were called.

Now someone had killed one of his own. He didn't like it. And he also didn't like how upset Yusuke was. He knew that Hoshiyo-san had been Yusuke's right hand, his wakagashira. This required careful consideration. Information gathering first, then complete annihilation.

He went to find his newest son. He found him where he expected to. He did not, however, expect him to be calm, coldly so.

"Yusuke?" Musashi settled on a zabuton that had been set out facing Yusuke.

"Yes, Oyabun. How may I serve you?" Yusuke bowed to the floor, kowtowing to his superior. He'd been hanging around in the main living room as much as he could, soaking up the proper ways to behave. He wanted something very badly and was sure that he was going to have to pay for it. He didn't mind. Hoshiyo was one of his and he wanted revenge.

"Tell me what you want and quit all that foolishness. It's good that you're willing to follow proper manners and all that but ... not with me. We're family. So speak to me."

Yusuke called for tea, which was brought by one of the youngest of the gaki. Yusuke poured tea then sipped for a moment. "I want revenge. Hoshiyo was mine. My friend, my second, my advisor. I want to know why they killed him. I'm pretty sure I know who. Or at least who ordered it." Yusuke scowled into his cup.

Musashi shifted to a more comfortable position. "You know who ordered this?"

"Possibly. Kato was not happy with the size of his cut. He made a few vague threats. Really vague one's. But ... I got a letter from a minor Shateigashira of the Saburo clan. He was threatening a takeover. Do you think this might be his first move?" Yusuke's inquiring expression warmed Musashi's heart. Yusuke was showing proper respect to him as oyabun and to his Wakagashira.

"Possibly. I have my people looking into this. It won't do to go off half cocked and whack the wrong man. We want to get the right people, and we want to make them sweat." Musashi sipped his tea waiting for any questions Yusuke might have. When none were forthcoming he nodded. When he held out his arms Yusuke crawled into them and wept.

They had the funeral three days later. It was a very small ceremony as Hoshiyo didn't have family. He was cremated and the ashes put into an urn. The urn was put into the crypt the family maintained for anyone who had no one else to see to their afterlife. It was attended by a Shinto priest at all times. This priest offered the proper prayers and Yusuke paid him to say special ones for Hoshiyo every day. They sealed the crypt and left.

.

It took three weeks to gather all the information and another to make plans.

It seemed that the manager wanted more of a cut and couldn't see why Yusuke got any at all. He was unaware that Miyamoto had given the business to Yusuke as seed. He had decided that he, Kato, was more deserving of the business than Miyamoto. After all, Miyamoto had a huge organization which produced a fortune every month. He felt that turning the business over to the Saburo gumi was just good business. Little did he realize that this decision was the worst of his life.

While his father had been getting to the bottom of the affair, Yusuke had been carefully preparing himself to deal with what he needed to do. He'd spoken to each of his sensei and received extra training. He'd also spoken to the gaki. They'd taught him things too.

One in particular was interesting. He'd been sitting in the big living room, playing Hana Fuda when a young gaki offered him a cigarette, another man had smacked him for it. He'd looked so down that Yusuke had accepted the cigarette. The result of his first drag had been less than satisfying. His coughing fit left his eyes watering. But he'd tried another, then another. By the time he got to the end of the Djarum Coklat, he decided he liked the smooth, clove scented thing. He calmly stole the rest of the pack.

He displayed a strange aloofness to those who weren't in the inner circle of the gumi. Musashi watched this without pleasure. It was one of the disadvantages to being who they were. It didn't pay to be too friendly with just anyone. It gave enemies leverage. Yusuke was too young to have to learn this, but it was too late, he already had.

He had always had a gift for being still and silent. It had saved him many a beating at Vernon's hand. Now he used it to remain unobtrusive, he found out a lot that way.

In this case, he found out that the Saburo gumi wanted to encroach on Hokkaido. They wanted to push their way into the rich area that the Miyamoto-gumi controlled. Unfortunately for them, the Yamaguchi clan held the whole island with an iron hand, Miyamoto's hand. His tiny laundry business was the toe in the door. A toe that was about to be chopped off.

Kato was the first to go. Miyamoto sent his finger to Mitsubishi Kiniichi. Kato was still alive, less all of his little finger.

He'd willingly cut it off as yubitsume, an offering of apology for his error in betraying his family. Miyamoto wasn't usually so forgiving but Yusuke asked for Kato's life and got it. No one was quite sure exactly why he'd done it, but the cold, distant expression on the young boy's face made even some of the most hardened men flinch. He was up to something.

Yusuke put Kato in the motor pool, driving low level collections agents (knee breakers) on their rounds. He didn't say anything much to anyone, just kept his head down, eyes on the ground and did what he was told.

Yusuke listened in on more business meetings now. He learned about smuggling and loan sharking, protection rackets and gambling. His clan didn't deal in drugs or whores. He worked hard at his business, his studies and his ninjato. He was just beginning to get into jutsu and was nearly ready to be given his first real sword. He was learning so much faster than anyone had expected that they were all taken a bit by surprise.

They were also very surprised at how powerful his magic was. They'd found some sort of block on it when Musashi had brought in



a healer to look at him. They'd removed that block and some other, unidentifiable, curses. The healer thought that the block had actually strengthened his magic, but said that constant suppression would have made it weaker after a few years. Just like constant starvation had stunted his growth, he was still taking potions for that.

During the month of preparation for the first strike on the Saburo gumi Yusuke gave his first recital of koto. Otousan was very pleased with his accomplishments and loved the rendition of Sakura. This was the first tune most koto players learned but Yusuke had learned several versions of it and played them in order of difficulty. His teacher admitted that the hour of practice he committed himself to, had paid off. No one except Musashi realized that Yusuke was an insomniac who stayed up until after two in the morning most nights and still got up at six.

His schedule would have driven a grown man to his knees. He got up at six, ran with the gaki assigned to him, did kata then yoga for two hours. A quick shower saw him ready for breakfast at 8:30 am. He had tutoring from 9am until 11:30 with different subjects every day. After a good lunch, he studied for two hours then went into the living room the gaki used and managed to entertain himself for the three hours Musashi insisted he use for relaxation.

This relaxation usually took the form of lessons in how to be a yakuza, although no one really realized this. The gaki told him stories of their adventures in collecting loans, beating down other gangs, or gumi, and wild tales of racing motorcycles and drifting. They also taught him Free running, taking him to Sapporo and Obihiro to run the streets. Everyone knew that Musashi knew what they were doing but he wouldn't interfere unless Yusuke was in some sort of danger. He watched from the shadows as Yusuke returned from these runs happy and smiling.

So, while the wheels turned, Yusuke carried on with his life. No one realized that Yusuke took in everything like a sponge, and he turned his lessons to the problem at hand and made plans for himself. Plans he would put into effect when it was time. If he'd learned anything at the hands of the Dursleys, it was patience and planning.

Musashi watched all Yusuke's activities with some amusement. The boy was turning out to be much more fun than he'd expected. He'd blossomed under the attentions of the gaki, kyōdai and wakashu. He

ordered them all around like the ojichan they called him. The young brothers, the shatei, loved him. The older brothers, the kyōdai, taught him useful things and treated him with respect. The foot soldiers, gaki, and the new recruits, wakashu, all followed him as if he was really an oyabun, the top boss. He thought back on everything and wondered what he'd gotten himself into. He was looking forward to the excitement.

Genji also watched. The last month had been a wild whirl of work for him but he took time out to watch young Yusuke. The boy was a machine that never stopped, he thought it must come from living with those Gaijin. They'd worked the kid into the ground and the only thing that had kept him going was his magic, blocked though it was. Now, he had plenty of good food, his magic wasn't blocked and everyone sucked up to him. Either because they wanted to be on his good side when he grew into his station or because they wanted to get on Miyamoto-oyabun's. It was amusing.

.

This meeting was not going well by anyone's standards. They'd been watching Mitsubishi Kiniichi the oyabun of the Saburo's. He was holed up in his private compound down near Kyoto and didn't come out for much of anything. This was nothing new, he'd been a near hermit for over 10 years now. But it was very inconvenient, even their best ninja couldn't get near him.

Everyone assigned to the project was reporting failure. They couldn't find a way in, nor a way to lure Mitsubishi out. They were reviewing everything in hopes of finding something.

Yusuke thought about everything he had heard then asked, "Where does he go when he does go out?"

The gaki who had followed Mitsubishi was still sitting quietly by the side of the room. He rose, bowed and settled near Yusuke. Treating him like a Fuku-honbucho he bowed again, cleared his throat and said, "He goes to a gym, but he has at least ten men with him there. And none of them work out with him, they all guard the entrances, even the windows are watched individually. He also goes to a karaoke bar ... same thing there. Most of the other customers usually leave the second he comes in. He's a horrible singer,

sounds like someone's strangling a cat, so they leave. The only people who stay are suck-ups of one sort or another."

Yusuke frowned and all the low level men cringed. They'd all seen examples of the boy's temper, and it wasn't pretty. He never exploded, yelled or hit, but he could cut a person to the bone with a few words. They all knew where he'd learned that particular behavior, he was just like Musashi, in fact, he used most of the same expressions, strung together differently and interspersed with some profanity that he'd picked up from the wakashu. It didn't matter that he'd copied his father, the fact that they always deserved it and were getting it from an eleven year old was what mattered. That cold, jade green gaze was unnerving coming from one so young.

The gaki trembled, bowed to the floor and whimpered, "I'm sorry, kumicho, I did the best I could. He's hard to follow, has eyes behind all the time."

Yusuke glanced at the man then eased his fears. "I'm sure you did your best. I'm just ... does he go anywhere else? Anywhere at all?"

The gaki nodded, "Yes, Kumicho. He goes to the sumo and to a geisha house. He likes the real ones, not whores dressed up in kimono. I did manage to overhear a few things by hanging around his guards. He wants conversation, not ..." realizing how young Yusuke was he stopped talking. "Um ..."

Yusuke, inured to sex talk by listening to the wakashu and gaki, just shrugged. "I don't need details, he's not interested in fucking, fine, what does he want?"

Musashi shared a look with Genji but didn't interrupt, this would be dealt with later. He nodded to the gaki, who was looking at him out of the corner of his eye.

Yusuke didn't realize that Musashi still had control of the session so he bopped the gaki on the head. "Hey! Pay attention. Get on with it."

"Sorry, Kumicho, sorry. Yes, yes. Um ... he wants someone to talk to that doesn't agree with everything he says. Someone to ... discuss things with that won't blab. So he goes to this house. The Pink Lotus, it's called."

Yusuke snorted. "How original." his disdain was obvious by his expression. He motioned for the gaki to go on.

"Yeah. Original, about three hundred years ago." the gaki agreed. "So ... he goes there, but none of the men are allowed in. They surround the place like the Imperial Palace though. I couldn't get near. I pretended to have an appointment but they nearly beat me up. I left before I made too much of an impression on them. And that's all I can tell you."

Yusuke asked questions about what the house was like. Was it new? Or old? Modern? Or traditional? After nearly half an hour of close questioning by Yusuke, Miyamoto, Genji, and several others, the poor gaki was dismissed, a sweating, trembling mess. He scooted out, scrambling on his toes without rising from a squat. This was not as awkward as it sounded as most Japanese people did it, it was easier to move a short distance this way instead of rising to their feet then squatting again. He slid the shoji closed and settled to wait a while in case he was needed again.

Yusuke motioned to a wakashu who approached him carefully. "Get that man a drink and give him some money. Otousan?" Yusuke turned to Musashi for help. "How much?"

"8,000 yen would be appropriate." This was a bit on the low side for so much work but Musashi wanted to see what Yusuke would do.

"Give him ten, with my thanks. And give him the good stuff, not some knock off." the wakashu started to leave. "And bring me some smokes."

"Ok, Oujisan, right on it." the wakashu hurried out to give the gaki his money and a stiff scotch.

He returned to bring Yusuke his cigarettes. "Here you go, Kumicho."

Yusuke took them with a grunt, making the man smile. Musashi smiled too.

Yusuke fumbled a bit then handed the pack back. "Open that damn thing." He returned to his thoughts while the wakashu not only opened the pack but lit one. He took it without comment and dragged on it.

Musashi waited for the kid to start coughing. He thought Yusuke was just showing off for the older crowd. It turned out that the kid smoked like he'd been doing it for years. All the older men made faces as they realized that he was smoking kretek, clove cigarettes.

Yusuke delicately picked a fleck of tobacco off his tongue then looked around. "What? You never saw someone smoke before? Turn your attention to the matter at hand, not my private concerns! Idiots."

Musashi just snorted, trying very hard not to laugh. "Someone get him a case and see that it's always full. Put a spell on it, if you have to."

Yusuke bowed to Musashi. "Thank you, Otousan. I'm thinking. But ... it won't jell, for lack of a better term. I'm going out to free run ..." He rose, then seeing the confused expressions on several faces, he explained, "It helps me think." He glanced at Musashi. "I'd like to go to Hakodate, if that's ok. There's a parkour park there. I'll take some men with me."

"Fine. You do what you want. But I don't want you going anywhere without at least ten men with you, and not runners. Ok?" Musashi had known he ran and didn't object. He did object to Yusuke putting himself in danger by not taking sufficient guards with him. Mitsubishi's example had reminded him how dangerous life could be.

One of the reasons he'd retired to the compound was that he was tired of being shot at.

Yusuke gathered a group of wakashu and gaki around him. He pointed to several. "You're guards. No running. Got me?" Nods greeted this proclamation. "And you." He pointed to the best runners in the group. "Run with me. We'll go to that park in Hakodate. Father said not to go unguarded. If there's too many people there for it to be safe, tell me and we'll go somewhere else."

They found that the park was nearly empty as most of the people who would be there were either at work or school. The employees looked at them askance but a few glares sent them back to their work.

Yusuke insisted that they use a section of the park that was empty of even employees, telling his guards that it made it easier on everyone and would make them welcome the next time they came. No one bothered to tell him that it wasn't necessary. He thought it was and that was enough. He was rapidly earning the title of kumicho that had been bestowed on him.

Yusuke indulged himself in an explosion of activity called free running, or parkour. He ran across the blacktop full speed, hit a wall feet first then backflipped off it, spinning several times before his feet hit the ground. He used every move in his now considerable bag of tricks.

His leaps and vaults could have used a bit more height, but they got him over the obstacles. His wall spins weren't as crisp as they could have been but he didn't fall. His kongs were good, his nimbleness making them sharp while his cat scrambles were excellent and garnered a flurry of cheers. He worked on getting a better spin on his front and back flips but enjoyed over and under's as his small frame kept him from getting jammed in the bars of the equipment. He enjoyed the freedom of movement and let his problems go for a while.

When they were done, collapsed in sweaty heaps on the benches, Yusuke started stripping off his equipment. He wore fingerless gloves to protect his hands from the rough concrete and heavy, long socks for the same reason. He'd gotten special free running shoes with thin soles to help him feel the terrain. He dumped all this off on a wakashu and demanded a smoke and a bottle of green tea. These were handed to him almost before he asked, the cigarette was even lit. He grunted once then took a drag off his cigarette.

He glanced around at the men lounging here and there and the others still on guard. "Ok, I'm thinking out loud. If I say something incredibly dumb let me know. OK?"

A flurry of 'Yes, Boss' and 'Sure thing, Boss.' greeted this so Yusuke began, "We need to get to that asshole, right? But he's guarded like the Emperor. That means we have to get to him outside his home place. That leaves the gym, which is impossible. The bar, again, impossible or the Pink Lily. No, Lotus. I need to know more about that. Mostly about the layout. Can we sneak in somehow?"

One of the wakashu interrupted him, "Sorry! I was one of the guys who checked that out. There's no way. They put men on all the rooftops, at every way in and even on the windows. There's no one else allowed in the house either. Ol' Man Kiniichi rents the whole thing for the night. The ladies that don't work that night get it off, as long as they leave the building. He's not actually a pervert as he doesn't have sex with the geisha. Not that that house would let him anyway. But he likes teaching the young girls how to go on with an older customer. Thinks he's helping or something. Most of the girls can't stand him. He's not very clean, he stinks of sweat and doesn't know what a tooth brush is for. But, he pays well and those girls are the real deal so they're always broke. Kimono costing what they do. And wigs ... and I don't know what else." He leaned back against a wall and drank his water, leaving Yusuke to think about this information.

He absently watched a gaki as he did tricks with a paper folding fan.

Yusuke watched until the man asked, "You like? I'll teach you. My sister does this sort of stuff at a tourist attraction." several men brightened but he snarled, "Don't go getting ideas, idiots. My sister is a good girl and doesn't want anything to do with a bad seed like me. She just tolerates me for mother's sake. Mother doesn't know what I do for a living."

Yusuke just ordered, with all the casual authority of someone much older, "Leave his sister alone. But keep an eye on her. Friendly like. She doesn't get trouble from anyone. Got it?" a chorus of 'Sure thing, boss.' answered him.

So Yusuke started learning fan tricks. This was all done rather absently as he seemed distracted still. The gaki didn't make any protest, if he could garner a bit of face with the Oujisan that was all to the good.

Yusuke suddenly dropped the fan with a blank expression on his face. He stood still for a moment or two then barked, "I got it. We need to go to Sapporo. Get me something clean ... no, never mind, we'll go home first and clean up. Come on."

They all scrambled to keep up. Not physically, Yusuke was still small enough that his flat out run was no more than a fast jog for the grown men, but mentally, they were scrambling fast.

One of the guards opened the 'gate' for them and they stepped through into the compound. Yusuke was still young enough that he wasn't trusted to apparate, which he hated anyway. But the Miyamoto family was powerful enough to be able to maintain a portable gate which Yusuke used to get from place to place. One of the gaki apparated to where ever he wanted to go, set up the gate then took it down again when they were done with it. He was also on call to most of the highest ranking members of the gang. Yusuke referred to most of this group as the Miyamoto-kazoku, or family.

Yusuke went to his room, found clean clothing then went to the big common bath. He had a small basket of toiletries with him. It didn't take him long to get clean and he didn't linger long in the soaking tub so he was dressed and ready when everyone else was. He handed his toiletries over to a wakashu to return to his room for him and went to find out who was going to go with him to Sapporo.

He wound up with fifteen men that Genji-san picked for him. He had realized quickly that Hoshiyo had done all that sort of thing for him, now he was going to have to learn to do it himself. He watched while Genji picked, trying to see what Genji saw. He wasn't sure about how the choices were made but he stored what he could away for later consideration.

He submitted to being apparated to Sapporo headquarters as Musashi needed the gate. It didn't take them long to walk to the origami shop Yusuke wanted to visit.

The old lady was there, as she always was, sitting behind the counter watching people walk by.

"Hello, Mama-san. Do you remember me?" Yusuke bowed slightly.

The lady nodded. "Yes, I remember you, young one. What do you want?" she settled back for a good listen. She might be retired but she still had connections. All the geisha in Sapporo bought their papers here and gossiped with her.

Yusuke grinned at her, a very different smile from what she expected. "I want you to teach me to be geisha."

.



in order not to interrupt the flow of the story I didn't describe most of the moves, if you're interested there are several really good videos on YouTube, just search for parkour or free running. In real life there is some difference between parkour and free running, to my eye they are so similar that whatever difference seems to be in philosophy.

The old lady blinked at Yusuke for a moment then sat down heavily. Her blank, "You want me to what?" left Yusuke smirking.

"Obaasan, I want you to teach me everything you know about being a geisha. And I'd like to know your name please."

"It's Omanami." she shook her head, waving one hand in negation. "Wait! Wait! You ... but ..." she took a deep calming breath and demanded, "Ok, never mind ... start at the beginning."

So Yusuke explained exactly what he wanted and why. He didn't know why he knew he could trust the old lady, but he was sure he could.

When he was done she just nodded. "Ok, you got it. My son is one of your customers. He doesn't like that other bunch." She used a disdainful word and insulted the gumi even more by refusing to use their name in combination with the insult. "He says you made everything good again and that they would just cast a cat amongst the pigeons. So. You're going to do something I don't want to know about to someone, I don't want to hear their name and you want my help." Yusuke just smirked a bit and nodded. "Ok, here's what we'll do. You'll bring me to where ever it is you live. I'll tell anyone who needs to know that I've been invited to vacation with an old customer. Then we'll train. You'll never learn to be a real geisha without a lot of work, years of it. But in ... a month, I can teach you to fake it enough to make it through a night. Ok?"

Yusuke nodded. "It'll do. Omanami-san..."

He was interrupted by the lady who just said, "No, don't call me that. That was my geisha name. I thought it might mean something to you. My name is Maiida Midori, call me that. Now, I need a few days to make my excuses and find someone to run the shop. I can manage it in four days. OK?"

Yusuke glanced at one of the gaki. He nodded and said, "I'll find someone we trust to run the shop. Won't be hard, there's lots of guys on the 'want to retire' list who'll do it for the experience. As to anything else ..." He glanced at Maiida-san and said, "You'll be wanting kimono and wigs?" she nodded. "We got kimono of all sorts, antique, modern, anything we might need from the skin out. The Oyabun's sister collected until the day she died." with that he

subsided, smiling a bit. He remembered the oyabun's sister, Sakura, with fondness. She'd always known about the family business and didn't worry overly about it. She just went about her cheerful way. Everyone had loved her.

Yusuke glanced at the man and thought, not for the first time, that gaki were much more than common knee-breakers. At least, some of them were.

He issued general orders and let the men take it from there. He had learned at Musashi's knee that micro-managing was not a good thing.

.

Genji-san watched all the going and comings with interest, then went to speak to Musashi. He was realizing that Yusuke was more than just some toy child. This kid was good already and getting better every day. His control of magic was terrific, he could do spells that gave some adults trouble. He was also sharp as a new knife, and soaked up information like a dry sponge. The fact that he could apply it better than half the upper class yakuza under his, Genji's, control was nervous making. He told his oyabun that they'd better put a good crew together for Yusuke before he put his own together and wound up with a bunch of knot-heads.

Due to the vast nature of the gumi, it had several kumicho, under Miyamoto's direct control, instead of the one that was normal. Each kumicho had three Wakagashira who had two shateigashira under him along with assorted fuku-honbucho and so-honbucho. Everyone thought each kumicho was an oyabun and they kept it that way. The Yamaguchi yakuza had a finger in every pie in existence, but they hid many of their operations by their organization. There were actually people who thought Miyamoto dead. He wasn't about to enlighten them, it was much more convenient to rule from the shadows. Much less trouble too. He dealt with a few old 'friends' himself but the rest of the business was managed by his sons, who were the three head kumicho, the ones who handed down the directives from the 'Hidden Oyabun'. In other words, Miyamoto Musashi.

Anyone trying to actually keep track of who was who at the top of this clan was going to get a giant headache very quickly. Even the

very top people were never quite sure of all the 'who's who' of the organization. Miyamoto was the only one who was sure, and he wasn't telling.

Of the nearly 400,000 men in the organization maybe 10 percent knew who Yusuke was. Of that 10 percent, a third of that actually knew what he looked like. Musashi had put the word out to his most trusted men and they'd done the rest. Genji had nearly 14,000 men to choose from. He was finally going to create the floating squad that they'd been talking about for years. If this worked out and Yusuke turned out to be what they thought he was. He started making calls. He had a lot of interviewing to do.

.

While his father and Genji were discussing things. Yusuke was also organizing. He called one of the kyōdai and asked if he could get Maiida Midori. When the man said he'd be happy to, Yusuke assigned him to stay by her side and do whatever she needed done.

The next week was busy for everyone. Men came and went through a side door, which led straight to Miyamoto's office. Other men appeared in the common room then left again.

Yusuke ignored most of this as his father's business. He eavesdropped a bit, but it was all interviews for places in the upper echelons of the organization so he stopped. He had enough to do.

He was tired of all the nameless, nearly faceless men who wandered in and out of his life. He'd had Hoshiyo-san, Genji-san and Kuma and that had been enough. Now he was moving up in the family and he needed more settled help. He decided that, after he got this mess over with, he'd ask Otousan for some permanent officers of his own.

For now, he was dealing with things one thing at a time, pulling gaki from the common room as needed. All the gaki were hoping for a choice spot with the young Kumicho they had dubbed Oujisan, prince. Most of them knew they'd never rise very high but perhaps they might be a wakashu or even a shateigashira. They could only serve loyally and hope.

Yusuke picked a man and said, "You! Do you know where the kimono collection is kept?"

The man jumped to his feet, bowed and said, "Sorry, boss, I don't. But I'll find out if you like."

Yusuke glanced around the room, but no one else stepped forward to say they knew so he just nodded at the man. "Ok, fine. Some gaki is bringing an old lady here tomorrow to help me with a few things. No one is to insult her in any way. Got it?" Nods all around assured him that they did. "Her name is Maiida Midori." and with that he went to his room to rest before lunch. He'd already had a long day, his lessons in control were hard. It was harder to lift a grain of rice than it was to lift a pound. It wasn't the weight that was a problem, it was controlling his power so that he didn't shatter it on the ceiling that was. And he hated ethics, not because he didn't agree with it, but because the teacher was using Socratic logic, and he hated that.

He settled at his desk to write some calligraphy to calm his mind.

.

At lunch the next day he was pleased to see that his father had made Maiida-san welcome. She was seated on his right hand side, smiling gently at everyone. As the only lady in the place, she was accorded the first helping of food after Miyamoto.

Miyamoto Musashi wasn't a stupid man, nor was he foolish. He knew that Yusuke was up to something. He also knew that he wouldn't appreciate interference. So, he just kept an eye on things, and left the boy to whatever he was doing. Word went out that, if something happened to the boy, yubitsume would be a head.

After setting this word abroad, he began to make his plans to back his son up. He was sure the boy would miss something important. After all, it was his first mission.

Yusuke for his part was concentrating on getting his training done. One step at a time was the way he worked. It was easier to adjust as things changed that way. He thought about what he was going to do when he got near his target. Stabbing him was an obvious option, but how was he to get away after and would it endanger the girls who would be in the room with him? He was sure there would be

several. Choking him was out too, Yusuke wasn't strong enough to get into a physical confrontation with a grown man, no matter how out of shape he was. That left poison. As a geisha, it would be part of his performance to serve the man. So poison it was. Just what kind was the next question.

"Genji-san? I need your help, please." Yusuke waited while Genji finished what he was working on and turned his attention to him. "I need a poison."

Genji didn't even startle, he just gazed at Yusuke for a moment. "Ok, what kind?"

Yusuke lit a cigarette, drew in a lungful then said, on a drift of smoke. "One that doesn't work fast. Something that just kills silently but can't be mistaken for a heart attack or something other than what it is."

Genji thought about it for a while. Yusuke smoked and waited. Finally, Genji asked, "When you say slow, do you mean one that works slowly or one that just sits in his system for a while then works all at once?"

"The second. I want to give it to him then have it work after he goes home. Then I want it to ... I don't care. I just want it to be obvious that he was poisoned. Can you help me?"

Genji gave Yusuke a considering look then admitted, "I could. But if I do and this fails, the oyabun will have my head ... literally. We should speak to him about all this."

Yusuke frowned as he stubbed out his butt. "Ok. But ... this is mine to do." He held up his hand, palm out in a well known gesture. "I know ... I'm young but Hoshiyo-san was my first friend ... he carried me. He taught me things. He sang to me and gave me a name and books and so much more. I hate that man. He ordered Hoshiyo killed like he was nothing." a blast of wind blew papers around and sent Yusuke's hair flying.

Genji patted the air between them with one hand. "Maa-maa. Calm down. Never lose your temper, nor let anyone see that you're upset. It gives them leverage. Now. Think carefully about everything, get your thoughts in order then we'll see the boss. Ok?"

"Ok. I'm sorry." Yusuke took a deep breath, Genji was right, if he lost his temper, he lost control of his magic. He couldn't afford that.

He thought back to the first time he'd lost his temper, ever. He'd been in the common room, playing cards with some gaki. Hoshiyosan had been nearby, reading a newspaper. He, Yusuke, had caught one of the gaki cheating. That wasn't what had bothered him, it had been the fact that the cheat had been clumsy and, when caught, the gaki had lied. Yusuke hated being lied to more than almost anything else. He'd blown up. The gaki. It hadn't been pretty as the man bloated, floated into the air and began to drift away.

Hoshiyo had fixed the mess, yelled at the gaki and told Musashi. His father had just shaken his head, remarked, "That was bad. Never lose your temper in public. Destroy your rooms, blast rocks on a mountainside, but never in public. Do you understand, my son? It's uncivilized. Only lose your temper in public when there's some benefit or gain. See?"

Yusuke had seen, he'd hung his head in shame and apologized. Musashi had accepted, saying he was just young yet. Yusuke had vowed not to shame himself or his father by losing his temper unnecessarily again.

Now, he calmed himself and followed Genji to his father's office. Miyamoto was interviewing a man who was sweating, unhappy and obviously relieved by the interruption. Yusuke glowered at the man for upsetting his father. Miyamoto had two small frown lines between his eyebrows and was clearly annoyed, to anyone who knew him well.

Miyamoto-sama was amused to see that the fuku-honbucho he'd been interviewing cringed when Yusuke looked at him. The boy was a pleasure to teach, he caught on so very quickly.

"Yes, my son?" Miyamoto dismissed the fuku-honbucho with a flick of his hand. "You are not suitable, please leave."

The man got up and hurried out the door. He was later to tell his friends, "That kid is ... just scary. He's an old soul and a warrior through and through. I don't doubt it for a second that he'd have cut my throat just for annoying the Oyabun. Little bastard is very creepy." He then got smashed for three days.

Musashi listened carefully as Yusuke explained his plan. When he finished, "I left some parts a bit vague so than I can adjust at the last minute depending on what happens on the spot. I'm not sure about parts so ... well, what do you think?"

Musashi nodded, gazing off into the near distance as his agile mind analyzed everything he'd heard. "Mmmmm. Not a bad plan at all. Especially for someone your age. I see why you invited the lady Maiida here. Who did you have picked to play the geisha?"

Yusuke just said, "Me." and waited.

"Ok. I see that. He was your man. But do you think you can manage to act like a geisha and not give yourself away?" He gave Yusuke a doubtful look. He also knew that they had no one in their organization that could pull this off. It was Yusuke or no one.

"Yes. I can play a geisha for one night. That's what Maiida-san is for. She's an old style geisha. She retired when she got too old to kneel for more than an hour at a time. She's still got contacts and everything. What I planned is to learn one song, one dance that I'll do that night. The reason they train so long is to learn a huge repertoire of entertainments. I already play koto and shakuhatchi. I'll just have to learn the proper mannerisms and a dance. Kimono won't be a problem if you'll let me have access to your collection. If you don't want to do that, I'll just buy one."

Musashi shook his head. "No, that won't be necessary. You can use anything you want. I think I'll sell most of them. It's time. As to the poison, I'll have to ... ask around. There are several. Some take a catalyst, others don't. I'm wondering which would be best." He sank in to contemplation, ignoring Yusuke for a few moments.

He startled after a bit then said, "Why don't you go practice your calligraphy. You'll need to have it perfect before you can make ofuda. And be sure you make the strokes in the correct order."

Yusuke, used to this sort of absent dismissal by now, just bowed politely and left to do as he was told.

He didn't make it to his quarters though. Maiida-san caught him in the hall.



"Ah! Miyamoto-chan, come with me. I have found the repository of kimono. We need to find exactly the right one. I have an idea. So, we go?" She smiled at him so hopefully that he just told a gaki to inform his father where he was and followed her.

He was awed to see the huge room, filled with stands and racks. The drawers filled one wall from floor to ceiling. Some drawers had a kimono in it, along with the obi that matched it. Other drawers had under kimono, obi-agi and other things that Yusuke only had a vague idea about. He endeared himself to Maiida-san by announcing, "I have no idea. You chose everything. Perhaps an inexpensive something to practice in?"

"Yes, yes. Excellent idea. I'll chose for you, but I need you here to check that the colors suit you." Her eyes shone in excitement at the thought of being allowed to see garments that she would never have been able to afford, even in her hay-day. She started opening drawers at once.

As she looked in drawers, she decided on what she called a 'cheat' instead of the formal 4 layers that a young geisha would wear, Yusuke would wear a susoyoke (half-slip), hadajuban or undershirt, nagajuban or under kimono, kimono, and a false collar. This was just a plain white silk one to keep the makeup he would wear off the kimono. The obi and its attendant obi age (bustle sash), obi ita (obi stay), obi jime (obi cord), obi makura (obi pad) came next. He was astonished to see that he also needed koshi himo, various cords, towels and actually would be sewn into bits of his costume.

He wondered if he'd even be able to move. When he voiced his concerns, he was told that most of his actual training would be in how to move gracefully in the heavy outfit. Maiida-san remarked that when she had been a maiko, she had actually had her ankles tied with a short cord to make her steps short and graceful. She laughed at his expression and admitted that she'd been a rice farmers daughter.

After picking out his kimono she gazed longingly at some of the beautiful kimono that would be appropriate for her to wear. Yusuke sent a gaki to ask permission and, after getting it, offered her her choice of anything she thought was appropriate for her to wear as his Onee-san, or older sister. His mentor. She was delighted and

picked out something he thought was rather plain. She explained that, at her age, the richness of the fabric was what was important, although she did pick a rather elaborate nagajuban and obi.

They fiddled a bit then she declared that he should one, call her Onee-san and; two, they had to have at least one dresser. Yusuke sent for Genji to ask what to do.

He was not that surprised to find out that several of the prostitutes that hung around, women he was not allowed to have any contact with, were more than willing to do the job.

Yusuke dressed in his kimono after his training and wore it the rest of the day. He had lessons in fan tricks, laughing, holding his head up in his wig and jokes, conversation and singing. His head whirled with all the things he was learning. He was not allowed to skimp on his regular activities, this training was added on. He was glad he only slept four or five hours a night.

He quickly learned that his age was a benefit, he didn't have a shape to be padded out with towels and extra sashes. But the kimono was heavy and the obi took some real work to get used to.

He managed however and within three weeks Onee-san announced that he was ready for some real time practice.

They had been careful not to let too many people see Yusuke or Maiida-san, just the dressers and a few others. Yusuke had stayed in what was now his wing of the house as much as possible. No one paid much attention to a very young girl in formal kimono wandering about the inner garden. Not if they valued their health, they didn't.

Yusuke sat patiently while his makeup was applied, then allowed Onee-san to put a hood over his head to keep his makeup off his kimono. He stood to allow the dresser to start putting on the layers of kimono and obi which would be tied in yanagi musubi style. It took him half an hour to be dressed but he stood, lifted his arms and feet as directed and then sat back down to have his wig put on. He accepted a mirror, approved his makeup and wig then stood. He examined himself in the full length mirror that was moved out for him. He turned this way and that then glanced at Maiida-san. She nodded and opened the shoji for him. She knelt through the door,

closed it and rose nimbly to her feet. She might be old but she wasn't that old.

Yusuke stepped through the door into the dining room and settled on a zabuton to wait for his guests to arrive. He'd arranged the flowers in the tokonoma at the bottom of the room. The small niche also contained a scroll he'd painted himself and a small incense burner. He sniffed carefully. He didn't want the incense to overpower, it needed just enough to lightly scent the room until the food arrived.

Miyamoto was the first to arrive. Genji entered the room, looked around then stepped back out. Miyamoto entered, walked to the zabuton set out for him and settled on it. Yusuke simpered in a proper manner and bowed low. "Sir."

"Yes." Miyamoto motioned to Genji who joined him, sitting on his left side. Then the rest of the guests entered. Kuma sat next to Genji then some man that Yusuke didn't know. Nakijima sat on Yusuke's left then a man settled next to him. No introductions were performed, geisha usually knew the names of their patrons. In this case, Yusuke didn't worry about it as his father and friends were there.

Yusuke poured saki under the watchful eye of Maiida-san, he didn't take any for himself as he was too young to drink. So, instead of drinking, he told jokes. Most of them were risqué, some down right bawdy, but he delivered them all in the sweet, innocent tone that made them even more shocking. The men all laughed heartily at them all. Yusuke hid behind his fan, fluttering his eyelashes and laughing shyly.

After two rounds of drinks, he got up to sing then dance a fan dance. Maiida-san played koto for this, then Yusuke played. During this, two real Maiko kept up soft conversation and kept the saki flowing. All the men except Musashi were getting very drunk. Yusuke was pleased to see that they still treated the maiko with respect. His family was old fashioned and remembered that neither maiko nor geisha were prostitutes.

He settled on the cushion the maiko vacated for him and poured his father more saki. He also poured for the man on his opposite side. The other maiko kept the rest of the cups filled.

The food was brought out when the fifth bottle was empty. Yusuke had decided on sukiyaki with noodles. It was easy to prepare and just the sort of thing Musashi liked. As he cooked, he kept up a patter of conversation during which he learned that the two strangers were actually Miyamoto Ichigo and Miyamoto Ren, his brothers. He treated them both to shyly innocent smiles.

Conversation flowed easily while they waited for the sukiyaki to finish. Yusuke demonstrated a few of his fan tricks while the men all clapped and laughed. The maiko all stayed in the background, learning all they could from an elder sister. Yusuke hoped vaguely that he didn't teach them any bad habits. Maiida-san watched too. She was very pleased with Yusuke. He would manage, if there were no surprises. She nodded to him, dipping her head with practiced grace.

Yusuke smiled back then called for tea. He poured for Musashi, who accepted the cup with a small bow.

He was just taking a sip when the soft voiced, "Otousan, have you found my poison yet?" nearly made him perform a very undignified spit take.

After controlling himself carefully, Musashi looked Yusuke over. "I don't believe it. You look ten years older and very ... feminine."

Yusuke smirked, then replied, "Thank you. It's the wig, I think. And this white face stuff ... well, look at the maiko. They all look twelve." He smiled at the two girls who put their heads down and giggled. They were both in their early twenties and just about to graduate to full geisha status.

Miyamoto Ren asked Yusuke to stand up, which he did with surprising grace. "Well, you look good. I think this will work. But I'd like to talk to you a bit, tomorrow perhaps?"

Yusuke nodded and bowed carefully. "Of course, Oniisan. Perhaps at breakfast. After my training."

Miyamoto Ichigo agreed with this. "That would be good. All the Miyamoto's together. I've been looking forward to meeting you. I apologize for taking so long to get here ... but business is business. Yes?"

"Of course, Oniisan." He frowned slightly. Having two elder brothers was going to get confusing.

Ichigo relieved this by remarking, "Perhaps you could just call us by name? Unless there's only one of us in the room. I think that would be better."

Yusuke bowed then returned to his seat by his father's side. He returned his attention to the subject at hand. "My poison?"

Ichigo-kun reached into a pocket. "Right here. And it is yours. I have confidence in your ability to get it into the target. Now."

Ren agreed, "Yes, we were actually wondering which of the three of ...er ... you was the right one. Excellent work. Amazing."

Yusuke bowed. "Thank you, my brothers. I am pleased to meet you and so very happy that you approve."

Ichigo nodded to his father. "I like him. But ... seriously ... he needs to change. That." he pointed to Yusuke's kimono with a grimace.

Ren just laughed heartily. "Go, little brother, change back into a boy."

Yusuke went, he was actually fairly glad to do so. His brothers were a bit drunk, something that bothered him a bit. Maiida-san followed him.

As she helped him take off the kimono she advised him, "Don't hold it against them that they got a bit drunk. I watched them carefully and, no matter that they were getting trashed, they were very nice to the maiko." she efficiently handed the kimono set off to one of the dressers. "So, do you want a suit or something more casual?"

Yusuke thought for a moment then said, "Everyone else is wearing a suit, so should I. The dark navy blue, lighter blue shirt, white tie, black socks. Yes?" He remembered being measured for his first suit with a slight smile.

Maiida-san nodded. "Yes. Very good. And you should introduce yourself with style." she helped him into his things, smoothing his lapels and making sure his tie was straight.

.

When he re entered the room he bowed to everyone at the table. Then he held his left hand in front of himself at waist height, extended his right to the side in a dramatic gesture and bowed his head slightly. "Hello! I am Miyamoto Yusuke, son of Miyamoto Musashi. From now on remember my name." He straightened up and smiled a bit.

Musashi was very pleased. He laughed and called. "Very good, my son. Come. Sit. You must be thirsty. Have some tea." He pushed a teacup over to Yusuke who accepted it happily.

Talk turned to plans to acquire their target, how to get Yusuke to the geisha house unnoticed and how, exactly, to slip the poison to him.

It was finally decided to just send Yusuke from Hokkaido to Kyoto dressed as a schoolboy. No one much paid attention to kids in a uniform. It was a long trip but he would be followed by several wakashu, just in case. Any form of magical travel would attract exactly the sort of attention they didn't want.

Maiida-san would travel separately, taking a different route. All the kimono they would need would be in her suitcase. This would be carried by her 'son', another wakashu.

They would take a room at an inn, dress as what they were pretending to be, a geisha and her personal maid and dresser. As soon as they were dressed and it was close to dusk they would simply walk to the Pink Lotus, enter the house and take care of business. Musashi cautioned Yusuke to be very careful to leave as quickly as possible.

.

Everything worked just as they'd planned. Yusuke made the trip without much trouble. He was even helped by a friendly older boy when he'd gotten confused in Tokyo. Yusuke had been worried that

the boy was trying to trick him somehow but he'd just led Yusuke to the proper platform and left him with a cheerful 'Sayonara'.

He checked into the inn and found that Maiida-san was already there. She helped him get dressed and they walked to the inn, stopping on the way to indulge in ice cream.

When they got to the house, Mitsubishi Kiniichi's people were already guarding the place. It didn't take the two 'ladies' long to get inside though. Liberal gifts to the Mama-san had paid their way inside.

Yusuke and Maiida-san slipped in the side door that all the geisha and maiko used. The house servants used a back door. They were greeted by the Mama-san and shown to a banquet room, through to a smaller room and left to rest until Mitsubishi came. They waited until the rather rowdy arrival of their target. Yusuke sighed, they could smell the man clear in here. He smelled of garlic and cheap after-shave.

Yusuke took a deep breath and walked through the door. He tried to remember everything he'd been taught. Keep your voice low and soft, speak the high class Nihon that Maiida-san had taught him. He breathed out and settled on the zabuton, smiling coyly. This was going to be a long night.

Mitsubishi insisted that Yusuke, or Sakura-chan, call him Kiniichi. Yusuke did so, but without any suffix, just the bare name. Kiniichi didn't notice the insolence, or didn't care.

Yusuke went through his performance without a flaw. He was applauded and then Kiniichi did as expected and insisted on his kiss. He only took one and it was chaste, no open mouth or tongue. But Sakura-chan's geisha makeup included a lip 'stick' that was comprised of melted soy wax, sugar and red color. Since the stick was melted by body heat then mixed with sugar, it was easy to combine the poison with the makeup. The kiss transferred a great deal of the color to the target's lips which he licked off with a smirk. Yusuke immediately excused himself to repair his lip color. This was what every geisha had done before so no one thought anything of it.

Yusuke quickly wiped off the color and poison, gulped the necessary antidote then went back in, he was going to take the time to get

Kiniichi thoroughly drunk. He was taken home by his men and died in agony three days later. Yusuke and Maiida-san left together after Kiniichi was taken home and returned to Hokkaido together, along with two of the wakashu. They looked like a family comprised of grandmother, grandfather, father or uncle and a thirteen or fourteen year old boy. No one would have recognized any of them.

When they got home, Maiida-san said goodbye to Yusuke remarking that, while it had been a great adventure and a reminder of her glory days, she would be glad to get back to her shop. Musashi thanked her and let her go home, sending a wakashu to escort her and carry her kimono bag. Yusuke would see her from time to time and made sure that everyone bought their papers from her.

But Musashi was not completely pleased with the job. He checked with all three of his sons and found that Yusuke had taken the surest and most dangerous way of getting the poison into their target. This did not please him as he'd told Yusuke to be careful. He did not regard Yusuke's method being careful. There was a chance that he could have poisoned himself. He did take into account the fact that the trigger for the poison happened to be red wine, something that most Japanese didn't drink much of. But Mitsubishi was fond of Italian food and insisted on having Chianti with it.

So, now Yusuke was kneeling before him in a formal reprimand.

Everyone was dressed in dark suits and kneeling, according to rank, around the room. Yusuke knelt in the middle of the room a rather forlorn expression on his face. His father was displeased.

Musashi didn't hold back. "I am very displeased with this. You disobeyed me in the most important part of my orders." Yusuke wracked his brain to try to figure out how he'd failed. "You endangered yourself. I repeatedly told you to be careful. Kissing that bastard with poison on your lips was definitely not obeying my command." He scowled at Yusuke. "Now, I want you to go out into the engawa and think about your apology. Go!" Yusuke got up and walked to the door with a steady step. He knelt, opened the shoji, knelt out the door then closed it. He was shaking, but no one would have known. He did have control of himself and his teachers would have been very proud of him.



He thought for a while then called a gaki to him. "You! Come here." the man knelt beside the boy. "Get me all the things I need for yubitsume. Fix things, then come and get me. Go!" The gaki knew better than to say anything. His young kumicho was nothing if not stubborn.

As they were deep in conversation about a smuggling contract, no one above the level of Fuku-honbucho noticed the preparations in the middle of the room. They did notice Yusuke come in and kneel at the small table. It wasn't unusual for an oyabun or kumicho to make an offending member of the clan actually write their apology in front of an assembly like this one.

Yusuke took a deep breath then motioned for a Fuku-honbucho named Wada to come sit by him. Everyone suddenly turned their complete attention to the middle of the room. No one needed a second to write an apology. Yusuke cleared his throat.

"Otousan, I am very sorry that I disappointed you. I did not mean to disobey you. Please accept this in apology." With that, he picked up the tanto, put his left hand on the table and raised the knife over his head. He was going to have to strike fast and hard.

Musashi realized what Yusuke was going to do just in time. His sharp, "Yamero!" made Yusuke freeze. Yusuke looked up at Musashi with tears in his eyes. "No. This is not what I wanted. You ... come here you foolish boy." Musashi held out his arms.

Yusuke dropped the tanto and scrambled right over the table and into Musashi's arms.

Musashi hugged him, something very unusual in public. "All I expected was a written apology. But you have made me very proud. Explain why, please."

"I never want to do anything to disappoint you. You've given me everything. Family, lessons, clothing. All the manga I could ever want. But, best of all love. I'm a Miyamoto. It is my duty." Yusuke didn't understand what was going on at first. Every man in the room stood, bowed and began to clap.

He glanced around then exclaimed, "What? I'm a Miyamoto. I am yakuza."

Miyamoto nodded to him, hugged him again then said, "Return to the table. You are right. You are a Miyamoto and a yakuza."

Yusuke returned to the table and was a bit surprised when Musashi motioned that another zabuton should be put on the other side of it. He called Ichigo to prepare the saki for the ceremony.

Ichigo mixed a bit of salt into the saki then a bit of sugar. The salt signified that the family would be responsible for his needs and the sugar to sweeten his life. Then he put out two cups, one much larger than the other. The large one he put in front of Yusuke and the small one in front of Musashi. Then Ren poured saki into each cup. He poured the large cup almost to overflowing, the smaller got a few drops. After that Masa knelt beside the table while Ichigo knelt on Musashi's right hand side and Ren on Yusuke's.

"Who will be guarantors for this man?"

Ren just nodded his head, agreeing to be one. Genji stepped forward and knelt on Yusuke's other side. "I will." Musashi looked pleased at this and Genji just grinned for a second.

Yusuke had been well educated in what to do, all the wakashu dreamed and talked of the day they were allowed this honor. All the gaki talked about their day.

Yusuke said his simple vows in a clear voice, promising to put the Miyamoto-kazoku before any other and to obey Musashi as his Oyabun. He then carefully picked up the large cup, took a tiny sip and put it back down. Musashi did the same with his cup. Ren then exchanged one cup for the other and the two men drained them dry. The applause was deafening.

Genji produced a small box from somewhere and picked up the small cup. He carefully wrapped it in a piece of white silk and put it in the box. He turned to Yusuke and said, "Usually, we'd give this to you and tell you to take good care of it. If you ever dishonor your vows and yubitsume isn't enough, your cup will be broken. That means that you've been thrown out of the family. You understand?" Yusuke nodded. "but, since you're so young, I'll be keeping it in my safe. OK?"

Yusuke nodded again. "Absolutely. Now, can I have a smoke? Please." Yusuke clasped his hands in his lap to stop them from shaking.

"Sure. Here! You! Get Oujisan a smoke." He motioned to someone sitting in the rank of gaki waiting for an order.

The gaki hurried forward and offered Yusuke a smoke from his own pack. Fortunately for him, he smoked Djarum 76's. Yusuke just took the lit cigarette and took a drag. "Man, that's good." The gaki retreated to the wall again.

They were soon involved in a drunken party that lasted the rest of the night. Yusuke had one very small cup of saki, then drank tea. Musashi had expected to have to stop him from getting drunk and was proud when Yusuke ordered tea after his one cup. He was even more proud when Yusuke headed off to bed at midnight. He just caught Musashi and Genji's eyes, bowed and left.

.

The next weeks saw little change in Yusuke's daily routine. There was some change in the particulars. He learned more ninjato than anyone had expected him to need, before he was accepted into the kazoku. Now he would be a fully-fledged member of the Miyamoto-kazoku.

And, since they really didn't know much about him, Miyamoto Masa decided to do some research. What he found made everyone exclaim in surprise. Musashi decided that Yusuke didn't need to know most of it, just that he had properties in England that his father was managing for now. Then Musashi assigned one of his most trusted kaikei and his companion shingiin to go to England and figure out what was going on with all the properties and investments. He then forgot all about it, expecting things to be managed properly and quarterly reports to arrive. He was not disappointed. Yusuke was told, in passing, that he had properties at 'home' and that they were under proper management. He just bowed, said, "Of course they are." and finished arranging his flowers.

.

Yusuke was inordinately pleased with himself. All his teachers said he was a prodigy. He supposed he was, if they said so. All he knew was that his father was proud of him. In fact, to show his pleasure, Musashi had given him another business to run, and a crew of his own. He now had officers, wakashu and gaki of his own. They all lived in his wing of the house.

He enjoyed fighting with the gaki and wakashu. His teachers watched his matches and gave critiques after. The wakashu and gaki were just glad that one of the new people included in the household was a potions master. Yusuke had turned out to be a vicious fighter who went straight for the soft spots. They were all proud of him, but really hated working out with him. They were very glad when he went out into the forests to train, it gave them a break and he came back in a good mood.

Not that he wasn't a pleasant person to be around, generally. He was, but his temper was explosive. Hard to spark, but once it was he was methodical in destroying everything necessary to get to the source of his anger. They'd taken to calling him Shinigami-kun, little god of death.

Genji took over teaching Yusuke about some important things. He gave him a pistol and taught him how to use it. The boy now carried a Beretta 93-R, a 14" tanto and a Colt 32 Bulldog. He knew how to make a bomb, a molotov cocktail and how to use C-4. He carried a bit of that too.

The thing about Japanese magicals was that they never told their children that something was impossible. If they asked how to do something they were just handed books and told to read up on the theory. Yusuke read manga at an incredible pace, especially considering his study load. But he admitted to reading them in the quiet of the night when he woke from a nightmare so no one said much. Musashi just paid for whatever he was interested in at the moment. He ran through Ranma1/2, Yu-yu Hakasho, Ruroni Kenshin and a dozen others.

He came up with the idea of 'mallet space' from Ranma and asked how to do it. He wound up with several theory books which said that it was basically an unanchored enlargement charm so he learned how to create one and anchor it to himself. He kept his swords in it,

along with a rifle, chocolate, cigarettes and explosives. Also, books, writing materials and food.

From Ruroni Kenshin he learned about several sword techniques that could only be done by the application of magic spells to the sword. He learned them easily enough but announced that the very idea of a reverse blade sword was stupid. He was given a very fine Musashi sword, spelled to a fine edge and was taught everything the masters knew.

Some of the spells from Yu-yu Hakasho were easy, others impossible. They took way more magic, or ki, than Yusuke had. He wasn't that disappointed. After all, he knew plenty of magical spells that did work. He also knew how to make ofuda and omamore. His teacher of warding and shielding was extremely pleased with him. His ofuda were very effective and his omamore were in high demand amongst the clan.

And so the years passed and a young frightened boy turned into a not so young Kumicho of the Miyamoto-kazoku.

The sight of him in a suit with his long hair in a high ponytail which he unashamedly admitted he'd copied from Ruroni Kenshin, smoking a cigarette was something to see. He moved with the natural grace of a well trained martial artist. The tilt of his head was arrogance personified. He was followed by a group of gaki at all times. Gaki that agreed with everything he said. He was inundated with cries of, 'Yes, yes, young boss. You're right, of course, you're very smart.' He mostly ignored them as they did the same to all the oyabun and kumicho.

No one outside of his personal household and his father and brothers knew that he was The Enforcer. The Shikkō-sha. There were rumors, of course, so everyone in the Yamaguchi-gumi was very careful around this cold eyed boy. Especially when he turned his blank look on them. That look promised screaming and pain on the Hidden Oyabun's word.

.

Albus Dumbledore was not a happy headmaster. It had been four years since he'd hopefully sent out an owl with Harry Potter's Hogwarts letter. The owl hadn't come back, but they'd received a

reply via Gringotts that Harry Potter was being home schooled. He'd filed it away and increased his attempts to find out where the boy was. He'd failed, the Gringotts goblins would only say that he was safe, so he made his plans around allowing Voldemort to find Harry for him.

But the Ministry, in its wisdom, decided to interfere in his plans. Minister Fudge ordered Gringotts to put a freeze on all the Potter accounts. He also forbade any further business until Harry Potter came to England and attended Hogwarts for at least one year. Dumbledore managed to persuade Fudge that bankrupting the Potter companies by forbidding them to do business wasn't a good idea. But that was all.

If Harry Potter wanted access to his personal vaults, or to take money out of any account including his trust, he had to come to England, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to be exact.

Takeda Kenzo sent a letter at once, asking what he should do. The kaikei was not a happy man, this was not acceptable. He'd gotten together with the legal advisor, Ayeda Hama who had told him that, basically, the Ministry had the ability to do this. They did not have the right, but there wasn't much to be done about it.

When Miyamoto, father and sons, finished reading the letter, they put their heads together and decided. The Potter fortune was much too large to allow it to leave the family. Therefore, Yusuke would go to Hogwarts. But someone would pay. Who, they weren't sure yet. That would be part of what Yusuke learned in England. He did admit that he was interested in wand magic. And Occidental Runes.

The return letter was simple, "Prepare for the arrival of Miyamoto Yusuke via portkey in three days." Arrangements were made.

As they tried to make them, they found that the Ministry, in its infinite wisdom, had even forbidden him to enter any of the several residences the Potter family owned. Miyamoto-sama just ordered, "Then buy him something in my name." They'd managed to find a very nice house on the outskirts of Plymouth. It was a combination of Japanese and English architecture that worked very well. It was immediately warded to a fare thee well.

The portkey was sent via messenger and Miyamoto-kun stepped through the front door of his new home with a scowl on his face. Both grown men cringed. This was not good.

"I would like to know who the fuck decided that I don't need my staff." It wasn't a question and no one took it as such.

Takeda-san started bowing and apologizing at once. "I'm sorry, kumicho, I'm sorry. The British Ministry wouldn't allow any of your other people to come with you. They said that, if you needed staff you could hire it here. Good English stock, or some such crap." Takeda knew he was sweating, but he couldn't help it. This boy was as dangerous as a tiger in a closet.

His scowl deepened and Yusuke snarled. He paced the front hall for a moment then said, "Go out into the community. I don't care what gumi they've sworn to, hire me some people. I'll worry about chain of command after I've met them. I need at least ... ten men. All magical. Right?"

"Yes, Kumicho. Anything you say, Kumicho. Excuse me, Oujisan, I'll just go now and see to it." Takeda quite frankly ran out the door, leaving his partner to deal with a very pissed off kumicho.

Yusuke, face tight with fury, glowered at Ayeda-san and said, "Ayeda-kun tell me where my rooms are."

Ayeda was glad to stammer, "But, Kumicho, the whole house is yours. No one else lives here. If you want any of the gaki to stay here, there's servants quarters out behind the house. Over the garage. There's room for ... say, six men. That's all you'll really need as you won't be allowed any men at Hogwarts. I checked. It's a boarding school." He made a face. "There's dorms."

Yusuke took his cigarette case out of his pocket and took one out. Ayeda hurried to light it for him.

He took a drag then let it out. "Well?" his impatient gesture made Ayeda very aware that he had kept the young kumicho waiting. "My bedroom?" Ayeda gulped and scurried to show Yusuke to the master bedroom.

Yusuke looked around the room with disgust although he kept his face carefully blank. "Western furniture?" he pinned Ayeda with a cold look. "Get rid of it." he went to look at the bathroom. Ayeda thanked his ancestors that it was traditional as he shrank the furniture and tucked it into a box.

Yusuke stalked from the bathroom to the door. So far, the place was barely acceptable. The other three bedrooms and bath were examined without comment then he went downstairs to look that over. The front parlor was acceptable, the next door library/office received a snarl and the kitchen/laundry got an irritable sniff. The dining room also received a quick look and a snort. Ayeda was in a panic. The Oujisan did not like this house and he made that abundantly clear.

After inspecting the back garden, Yusuke sat down on the back terrace and finished his cigarette. "Ashtray."

Ayeda hurried into the kitchen to get one. After placing it near the young kumicho's hand he asked, "Will there be anything else?"

A flat, cold, "No." sent him scurrying out the front door. He wasn't about to stay with the embodiment of Shinigami. It wasn't safe. He was in his car before he realized that there was no way the Hidden Oyabun would approve of him leaving a sixteen year old alone in a strange country. He started to sweat again.

He knew that the boy was perfectly capable of killing the whole neighborhood without a qualm but ... the Oyabun would not be pleased, something devoutly to be avoided. This could bring a visit from the Shikkō-sha, for leaving him alone. Ayeda groaned softly.

He nearly jumped out of his skin when Yusuke banged on the door. "Oi! Asshole, come back inside. Otousan will have your head, you stupid bastard. I never thought, but you better not leave me in that house alone." he then turned on his heel and went back inside.

The shingiin swore and followed him, muttering about cat-footed little bastards as he did so.

The next day brought four gaki who were actually Yamaguchi-gumi. They were in England on personal business and had gotten a call from Japan. They had willingly come to speak to Yusuke-sama. It



was very unusual in Japan, but all the Miyamoto Kumicho were called by their personal names. The only one called Miyamoto-san was Musashi, it was too confusing to try to keep them straight when they were all technically Miyamoto-kumicho.

He accepted them all without too much questioning. He had a way of looking through a man and right into his head. He always knew whom he could trust. Or almost always. Abusing his trust was not a good thing to do. It was quite possible that it would get you killed. Or seriously maimed. The young kumicho in a temper was the embodiment of terminate with extreme prejudice. As one man had said, "We call him Shinigami-kun, but that doesn't mean he's soft."

.

After informing some Assistant to the Minister that he was in England, Yusuke waited for some form of communication from someone. Nothing came. He was glad he'd waited until after his father had done some investigation, otherwise he'd have no idea what to do.

Since he did, he ordered one of his new gaki to side along him to Diagon Alley. He popped into existence in a sheltered area reserved for that purpose and headed for the huge white building that was obviously a bank. And that was all he knew about it. He did smile a bit as he read the caution on the door.

Then he blinked as he realized that the guards were not human. He bowed slightly to them then entered the bank, noticing that they bowed back.

He went up to a teller and said, "I am Miyamoto Yusuke also known as Harry Potter. I understand that I am allowed access to my trust vault?"

The teller looked at him, grunted and said, "Yes, and that is all. You are not allowed access to anything else. Ministry orders." Yusuke could tell that the goblin was not happy.

After taking a drop of blood to verify his identity the goblin took Yusuke to see his vault. The gaki were not pleased to find out that they couldn't come with him. They positioned themselves as near the entrance to the cart tracks as the goblins would allow, grumbling

unhappily. Takeda and Ayeda both argued that they should be allowed to go down with Yusuke but were told that, since they had no vault nor was their name on any of Miyamoto-kun's, they couldn't.

There was a lot of gold in it. Yusuke eyed it and thought. Finally, he turned to the goblin and asked, "What if I empty this vault and put it in a new one?"

"Still under your name. Ministry would just order it sealed too." Yusuke was sure he heard the goblin mutter, "Interfering with profit."

Yusuke bowed to the goblin and said, "Honorable Goblin, may this one know your name?"

The goblin looked at him for a moment then said, "Swordmaker, thank you for asking."

Yusuke then asked him, "If I take all the gold out of this vault and put it in one under someone else's name, what happens?"

Swordmaker thought for a moment then said, "I hope that they are someone you can trust."

"I trust my Kaikei to handle all my affairs. He's done well for over eight years. If we establish a vault with his name only on it, can I still draw from it?" Yusuke watched as Swordmaker gave him a sharkish smile.

He thought a bit more then allowed that it would work. As Yusuke was only on the vault as a signatory rather than an owner, it would work. He then gave Yusuke a bottomless bag, telling him to fill it while he went to make arrangements.

Yusuke didn't bother to argue, he just waved his hand and watched as the goblin's eyes widened. The gold poured into the bag like a flood unleashed. A few seconds later he said, with some satisfaction. "There. Now what?"

"We go out the door and wait to see if it refills. If it does, we can empty it again. But more than that might be pushing our luck." Swordmaker smirked a bit. He did so love tweaking a wizard's nose.

So, out they went, closing the door behind them. The jingle of gold tumbling about in the vault was clearly audible even through the thick wooden door. Yusuke emptied it again except for one galleon. This he left on Swordmaker's advice.

When they returned to the surface, Yusuke had to take a moment to pull himself back together. He hated roller coasters and other such foolishness. His one experience with an amusement park had been a disaster of epic proportions. It had ended very badly and they'd lost three wakashu.

Takeda nearly had a heart attack when he heard what Yusuke was up to. He was appalled that Miyamoto-sama was going to trust him with nearly a million dollars, he whimpered slightly as he converted it to Pounds then Yen. He was trustworthy, he had to be. He liked all his fingers, beside the fact that he was proud of his reputation as absolutely incorruptible. He took a deep breath and allowed that this was a good way to get around the Ministry's decree. He signed where the goblin pointed and got Yusuke a money bag.

The bag was one which replenished itself automatically so Yusuke wouldn't have to visit the bank. He smirked in a way that made even the goblin shudder.

When he lifted his hand and stuffed the bag into nothing the nearby goblins all stared. Yusuke realized that they were curious, intensely so, but way too polite to ask any questions.

Dipping his hand into his coat pocket, he pulled out a cigarette, a gaki jumped to light it for him but he stopped him. Yusuke looked at the goblin for permission which was granted with a nod. He smoked for a moment then said, "I think I was supposed to get a letter? Could you tell me why not?"

Swordmaker shrugged, "No idea. Come with me." he led the way to his office, offered refreshments, which were refused and rang a bell.

The bell was answered by a goblin who bowed to the room then asked, "How may I help you?"

"Mail for Harry Potter or Miyamoto Yusuke. Find out where it is. Deal with what needs dealt with and bring the rest here." he tapped his claws on the desk, something that was obviously a habit as the top

was scarred here and there with clear claw marks. Yusuke continued to smoke.

The goblin returned and announced, "Fan mail is handled by elves here. Letters of thanks for every item are sent out. Form letters of acknowledgment. Expensive items are stored in a vault, the rest ... inappropriately aged toys and such, go to orphanages all over Europe. Anything to do with business goes to either Mr. Takeda or Mr. Ayeda to handle. Here are three letters that do not fit any of those parameters." He handed over a folder and left.

Yusuke nodded his approval of these arrangements when Swordmaker glanced at him. He took the folder, realizing that the goblin never challenged him by looking him in the eye. He raised an eyebrow and Swordmaker return a smirk. They understood each other well.

Yusuke read the letter from Dumbledore, then told Swordmaker to send an owl with his reply that he was coming to Hogwarts. The second letter was some nonsense about being regent to someone called Black. He handed that one to his adviser and accountant. They'd deal with it. The third letter was actually the second page of his Hogwarts letter. It was his book list as well as a list of all the other things he needed or was allowed to bring.

He nodded to the goblin and left the office.

When Yusuke is talking to the gaki and Hedwig, he's speaking Japanese. The rest of the time, he's speaking English peppered with Japanese.

.

Yusuke exited the bank with his list in the hands of a gaki whose name was actually Koga. No family name, just Koga. Yusuke immediately called him Koga-kun. The man was in his early forties with a round face and stocky build. He greeted his naming with a grin that showed his gold tooth.

"Where are we going, Kumicho?"

Yusuke put on his sunglasses and headed off. "You figure it out."

Yusuke glanced over his shoulder as the rest of the gaki caught up with his long strides. He was about average height for a Japanese boy of his age but he had that talent that some people have of walking with a 'long' stride. The gaki had to scurry to keep up.

Yusuke looked at Koga for his first stop. Koga replied quickly, "The best I can say is, wand shop? Best to get that out of the way first. And you'll need a good trunk. No sense in getting a student trunk. They only last about eight years. Get a good traveling one instead. I'd say get yours sent over from Nihon but we don't have time."

Yusuke shrugged. "It's not in good shape, some idiot wakashu dropped it last week and cracked a panel. It's being repaired. I'll just ward whatever I buy."

Every gaki quickly agreed with this, declaring loudly, "Yes, yes. Great idea, kumicho. Wonderful." No one noticed nor cared that people on the street were looking at them.

They made it to the wand shop, Ollivander's, in seconds and entered to the spritely jingle of the spring bell over the door. Mr Ollivander was a bit disappointed when no one flinched when he popped out from behind the shelves. The young man had to be at least 15, much too old to need a first wand but Mr. Ollivander didn't recognize him. He as very proud of remembering every wand and wizard or witch who'd been in his shop.

"So, young man, what can I do for you?" Ollivander gave them all a bright eyed once over then settled to wait for his customer to speak.

It didn't take Yusuke long to decide that the old wizard was crazy. He didn't have much patience and crazy people tried it quickly. "I need a wand. Get to it. And no games." This old man was a game player, Yusuke was sure of it, and he hated games. Get to the point as politely as possible. He used manners to his ends, not the other way around. Anyone attempting to manipulate him using 'good manners' as an excuse was doomed.

Mr. Ollivander did love his games, but he was well aware that this young man was not in the mood so he got started with a smile. "Very well. Here try this one."

Yusuke picked up the stick with a scowl. It was cold in his hand, and he knew it wasn't going to work. He didn't have time to say so as it was snatched out of his hand with a grumbled, "Well, not that one." He tried out over a dozen more with the same results. He was rapidly losing his patience, so he just held out his hand and barked, "Wand!" A wand flew out of the back of the shop and right into his extended hand.

The gaki didn't even blink at this but Mr. Ollivander stared. He finally asked, "Do you have another focus?"

Yusuke just forgot his English all of a sudden. "Ah?" He looked down his nose at the man for a moment, pulling his sunglasses down to the end of his nose to do so. Then he held out a handful of galleons and sickles. He let Ollivander take what he wanted then motioned for two men to precede him out the door. He gave Ollivander a glower, then left without giving him time to say whatever foolishness was on the tip of his tongue.

The next stop was Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions. He hated the very idea at first sight. He didn't like the sleazy fabric, the too straight lines nor the half button front. When Madam informed him that most students didn't bother to button them up, he just blandly said, "Then why put buttons on them?" Madam just shrugged her shoulders then offered him a swatch book with a rather hopeful expression.

Yusuke took the time to flip through it, but nothing really caught his eye. Madam Malkin offered him a different swatch book with more adult fabrics in it as well as a pattern book. He chose a full bellied robe with a tap of his finger, instructing that it should be made in a deep blue brocade. His expression didn't change when madam said that was more for adults. He just said, "Those or nothing." she acquiesced with a tiny frown. He motioned to a gaki to wait for the robes, which madam assured him would be ready in an hour. He left without buying anything, but the two sets of robes. He wasn't about to waste his money on any more of her wares than he had to. He had plenty of things to wear under his robes, which he intended to wear as little as possible. He considered objecting due to cultural reasons.

Every other shop was easy, he just sent in a gaki to show the list and get what was needed. The only other shops he would actually visit himself were Eylops Owl Emporium, Traveling Treasures, the trunk shop and Flourish and Blotts. He was well aware that an owl would never make it from Scotland to Japan in less than six months, no matter how strong or smart it was. But he could send the owl to Gringotts and have the letter forwarded by messenger from there. And he wanted to get his books himself. There was no way the book list could possibly be complete, no matter what anyone said.

So they entered the emporium to look around. Yusuke didn't like it at all. Most of the owls looked miserable. They were well cared for, all the cages were clean with adequate food and water. But owls are diurnal, at best, and keeping the poor birds in a bright shop in small cages wasn't what he'd call kind. He looked in several cages but got no reaction, most of the birds just looked at him, other's didn't even bother to do that. He finally found a beautiful snowy owl who looked back at him with brilliant yellow eyes.

He reached to open the cage, but the clerk stopped him. He warned, "I wouldn't do that. The bird pecks."

Yusuke ignored the clerk and addressed the bird in Japanese, "Konichiwa, fukurō-san." The owl blinked at him, then nodded her head as if she understood. He opened the cage then offered his arm to the owl as if she was a falcon. "Ah? Dan." He offered his arm again and waited for the bird to step onto it as commanded.

The clerk offered hopefully, "Her name's not Dan. It's Hedwig. Named after some goddess or something. She seems to like you. I'll make you a deal on her."

Yusuke just grunted at a gaki, "Pay the man." and ambled out. He transformed a bit of something into a falconers gauntlet. He was well aware the owl, Hedwig, had been trained not to grasp his arm with her claws, but he saw no reason for the bird to tire herself out balancing so awkwardly. "Better?" a bob of her head and a soft churring greeted this. "I thought so." he called Koga forward and handed Hedwig off to him. "Hold her until I get out of the book store."

The gaki obediently took the glove and let Hedwig step onto his arm. Another man came running up with a cage and a bag he said contained food and treats. He also had a perch for her. Yusuke instructed him to keep the perch and food but take the cage back and get more treats. He wasn't going to put his owl in a cage, rules or no rules, she didn't deserve to be caged. He stroked her breast with the back of his index finger. "Musho no good for you, eh?" she nibbled at his finger chuffing softly. He was to find out that snowy owls didn't hoot, they barked, churred and made a sound suspiciously like a purr.

He petted her again then turned to the bookstore. He sighed as he realized that there was some sort of special event going on. This was going to be a nightmare. Taking off his sunglasses, he eased through the door, glowering at the two gaki who wanted to go in with him until they retreated to the side of the door. He glanced at the list he'd taken from Koga, then he looked for a clerk. He found one hiding behind a display of books by someone named Gilderoy Lockhart, a grinning fool by his estimation.

He nudged the clerk in the side and handed him the list. "I'd like all these books and any you could recommend as more in detail reading."

The clerk took the list and nodded. "Ancient Runes? Ok. I have a couple of really good books on that, but they're expensive. And you're taking Arithmancy too. Runes and Arithmancy go hand in hand. There's a really good book on combining the two to create powerful magic. History of Magic? Just read the book and Hogwarts: A History, skip class, unless you need a nap. Binns is so boring it's



appalling." he glanced back down at the paper and realized that two classes had been crossed off. He didn't blame the boy; Care of Magical Creatures was a dead bore, nearly as boring as History. And Astronomy was a waste of time unless you were taking Divination, which this boy wasn't. "Ok. Defense Against the Dark Arts and Herbology. The texts for Herbology are nearly worthless and that idiot Lockhart has you buying his complete collection, so ... I know several books in both that are well worth the money. And that's all you're taking? Oh, no. Potions. Right. You'll hate Snape with a passion, make no mistake. He's a bastard through and through. He only likes Slytherins and takes things out on the students. He stubs a toe? He takes points from Hufflepuff."

Yusuke made a note to check the man out carefully. He didn't need problems first thing.

The clerk dragged him around the store, gathering books as he went, and explaining which books were the best, the most expensive, but not worth it and some that he said would make a good door stop. Yusuke glanced at the Defense books, and realized that there were several and, as the clerk had said, all by the same author, Gilderoy Lockhart. He sneered. The man was an idiot.

His book titles showed that clearly, Wandering With Werewolves, Vacationing with Vampires? He snorted, he was avoiding this man as much as possible. Ambling with Onnas? Really!

He watched Lockhart from behind the same bookcase he'd found the clerk behind. After five minutes he found out nothing more of interest, except that women seemed to think he was something special, men couldn't stand him.

He left the store and returned to the gaki, who'd all gathered around Koga.

Koga was looking particularly proud of himself for being allowed to hold Hedwig. The rest of the gaki were alternately watching the crowds and looking enviously at Koga. Yusuke allowed him to continue to carry her as he made his way to the luggage shop for a trunk.

The last place was Traveling Treasures for a trunk. Yusuke had a great trunk at home, the cracked panel had it in the shop, but he

was unsure if it would be allowed or not. It was actually a small house of sorts. Comfortable for a few days, but not meant for more than that. He decided to look for something a bit more suitable for school. He really wasn't sure what he wanted.

He thought about that as he walked toward the store. It had to be roomy, but not flashy. He didn't want some curious idiot to trip all the wards he would put around it, but he needed a lot more room than a simple student trunk could give.

When he entered the shop he experienced the first incidence of 'Potter worship'. The clerk got a good look at him and yelled, "Harry Potter! Oh, Merlin! You're here." He stumbled around like a fool while Yusuke looked at him like he'd lost his mind. He regretted leaving his sunglasses off.

Yusuke summoned all the gaki to come into the shop. He wasn't afraid of the man but he was wary of him. Who knew what a crazy man would do? He thought the gaki would keep him from having to kill the man, just by being there.

"Control yourself! Baka Gaijin!" He glared at the clerk, who gawped back. The look could have curdled the clerk's blood in his veins. "I need a trunk, not some ... chikushou! Shimatta!" His pointed glower brought the clerk back to his senses with a nearly audible click. "And who, exactly, invited you to use my name?"

The clerk realized that the person he saw was nothing like what he expected. This boy was hard and cold. His eyes sparkled with intelligence, but also pierced him like knives. He took a deep breath. "I'm so sorry, sir. It's just ... such a shock. We've ... the entire of Wizarding Britain have been looking for you for years. Now .. you're back. It's just ... exciting." He sighed the last of his breath out then calmed himself. "What can I do for you?"

"I need a trunk. Not a student one. But not a five or nine compartment one either. Something in between." Yusuke stood out of the clerk's way and waited for him to do his job.

The man didn't disappoint him. "Ok. Not a student trunk, but nothing ... well, certain types of trunk are prohibited at Hogwarts. No trunk with a room compartment is allowed. Too much chance of ...

illicit goings on. But we have a very nice apprentices trunk that is allowed."

Yusuke motioned to a gaki, barking, "Help him. I have no intention of dealing with this fool longer than I have to." Yusuke realized that he was on the verge of losing his temper, something that he knew was counter productive most of the time. And something that would disappoint his father. He sighed it away.

The gaki, who'd all braced for an epic explosion, relaxed. Two of them hurried to pull the trunk out for Yusuke to examine.

He watched as the clerk demonstrated its features. The first compartment was only accessed when the trunk was on its end; then a quick flick of the lock opened it out into a huge armoire, or wardrobe. The bottom section was two drawers, one for shoes and boots and the other for folded clothing. The shoe compartment held a dozen pairs of shoes and four pairs of boots. The upper drawer held underwear. Above the drawers, two doors opened to reveal a set of side drawers for sweaters, handkerchiefs, neckties and any other folded item. Yusuke knew that at least two of the eight drawers would hold kimono, hakama, obi and tabi. The rest of the space would hold shirts, suits, trousers and other hanging garments.

The second compartment was also accessed from the side. The clerk closed the trunk, turned it around and fiddled with the lock, explaining, "I'll show you how to do this. It's not hard." Then he popped the trunk open again. This time it split neatly in half and morphed into a very well organized study area. The top part was a book case where the book you wanted was always to hand. The desk had a leather covered writing area with two inkwells. The clerk reminded Yusuke to remember to cap his inkwells. They wouldn't leak but the ink would dry out. There were several drawers that were obviously for paper, pens, scrolls and other study aids. Yusuke was pleased to see that the desktop was huge, allowing room to set out open books and it had a lectern to the left side, which allowed for reading a scroll without holding it. It had shallow trays in the front and back to keep the scroll from completely unrolling or falling off the desk.

The third compartment was empty and fairly large, the clerk said it was 10'x10', but was spelled so that no one could actually get into it. He showed Yusuke how to activate the shelves and racks. They

rotated to the front via some mechanism that the clerk couldn't explain. He only knew how it worked. He said that anything put on the shelves or racks would remain in place, no matter how you shrank or turned the trunk.

"So you see? And I know that Professor Snape has one nearly like this. I think it's four compartments. One of them a complete potions lab." The clerk sighed. This cold faced boy was nothing like what he had expected. He admitted to himself that he was slightly afraid of him.

Yusuke examined the spells around the trunk and nodded. After having the clerk demonstrate how to work the trunk he said, "Ok, I'll take it." he walked out, taking Hedwig from Koga on the way. His patience was completely gone. All he wanted now was to go back to his house and have some tea.

Koga paid for the trunk, shrank it down with a gesture and dropped it into the shopping bag another gaki was carrying. They hurried after Yusuke, who was talking to Hedwig in Japanese. She seemed very interested in whatever he was saying.

He talked softly to her until all the gaki had gathered around him, he checked especially for the one he'd left in Madam Malkins. Then he drew a piece of ribbon from a pocket, handed Hedwig off to Koga and his overcoat to someone else. He turned the ribbon into a portkey, although that's not what he called it, and took them all back home.

He spent the next two weeks smoking, playing Hana Fuda and reading his text books. He also worked out. His sensei all said, "Never lose your edge."

.

On August 20th, he realized that he'd never gotten any information on how to get to Hogwarts. Instead of doing what most 16 year old boys would do, which was bluff his way through, as he never bluffed, he just turned to Koga and said, "How the fucking hell do I get to Hogwarts?"

Koga shrugged, took a drag off his cigarette and said on a cloud of smoke, "No idea, Kumicho. I'll find out." And with that he stood up

from his cross-legged seat and ambled out, adjusting his yukata as he went. It didn't take him long to come back to settle on his zabuton again. "Ok, Kumicho. Here's the deal. You take a damn train. I asked about other ways there but it's supposed to be some sort of bonding experience. Get you in the right mood or something. Real pain in the ass. Need a ticket but I got a person on that."

Yusuke made a face. "A fucking train? You've got to be kidding me."

Koga just sighed. "No, Kumicho, I'm not. Talked to someone named McGona something. She said she's Deputy Headmistress. She's going to send a ticket."

Yusuke just sighed, "Well, shit."

Koga silently agreed, trains were the very devil for security reasons. All those people wandering around. He shook his head and settled in to smoke. He eyed his Kumicho out of the corner of his eye. He wondered why anyone would want that young terror in their school. And he, Miyamoto Yusuke Kumicho, was a terror. Yakuza didn't call someone Shinigami, God of Death, or Shikkō-sha, The Enforcer without good reason. He'd even heard the boy called

Bokunenjin, the quiet one and Zankokuna tenshi, cruel angel. He had to admit that the last one was very applicable, the kid could really go off the deep end when someone threatened his family, especially his father or brothers. But he was just as defensive of his men. If you won his loyalty and love, it was a treasure beyond price. If you threatened his family, you'd better have your coffin ready. He thought that Bokunenjin fit well. When Yusuke-sama got quietly angry, things were bad. Shinigami fit him too, when he was ninja. He sighed smoke out his nose and returned his thoughts to security.

Yusuke smoked, thought and planned. He was almost invariably polite, he reserved shows of temper for impact, just as his father had taught him. With a few notable exceptions. However, these English wizards were beginning to annoy him. He wondered when, or if, he would need to kill someone. He didn't even jump when an owl landed on the window sill.

The owl politely offered it's leg to him. He took the small package off its leg, offered it a treat from a bowl on the table and turned to his mail. The package contained his ticket and directions to Platform 9

3/4 as well as how to get in by walking through the pillar between platforms 9 and 10. He shook his head in annoyance. These people were all crazy.

The next ten days were a trial to all the gaki, Miyamoto-kumicho was not in a good mood. He didn't take it out on them but they walked on eggshells anyway. Yusuke was less and less sure of the wisdom of his fathers orders, but Miyamoto-sama ordered, and Miyamoto Yusuke obeyed. This did, however, make his temper unsure, at best. He wasn't the sort of person who punished people just because he could, he left that to those who were unsure of their power and control, but he snapped a bit more than usual and smoked like a chimney.

The day of 1st September dawned sunny but chilly. Yusuke put on a steel grey suit by Armani with a light grey silk shirt and socks and Gucci shoes. His tie was a bluish grey. He scowled at the sky and grumbled, "It's damn cold. I already hate England."

Koga cringed slightly but announced, "Me, too, Kumicho. And Scotland is even worse. You better take this." He handed over the dark grey overcoat which Yusuke accepted and draped over his shoulders. You'd never catch him binding his weapons by buttoning a coat over them. Warming charms did a lot, but they worked better in conjunction with a warm garment, sympathetic magic could be a bitch.

They Folded to the alley behind King's Cross station without breaking step. Folding was very simple, the traveler just 'stepped' from here to there by folding reality. Yusuke had read about it in a physics book and figured out how to do it, with a lot of help from arithmancers, but still, the idea had been his. He had also been the first person to actually do it.

They entered the station via a door conveniently situated in that same alley. They walked to the barrier between wizard and muggle worlds. Then one reason why the young kumicho was in a bad mood was revealed.

"Well, I guess this is it." Yusuke rubbed the back of his neck. "I hate leaving you all behind, but I'm not allowed gaki at school. Sucks, but there it is." he blessed his new men with a blinding smile. "I'll miss you all. Go back to Japan until ... Christmas Holidays. I'll let you

know when they start. Close up the house except for one of you." he checked his pockets for his cigarettes and lighter. His trunk was in his mallet space as were several other useful things.

He also carried several weapons on his body. He had weapons in mallet space but it was sometimes hard to access that without letting on that he had it. He carried, as a matter of habit, a 9mm Beretta 93R in a shoulder holster, a set of throwing pins on his left forearm and a Balisong, or butterfly knife, in his pocket. He also had a tanto strapped to his outer right leg. His wand was in a wrist band that looked like a leather bracer about two inches wide. It worked like an old fashioned gamblers 'hand out' a simple motion and it was in his hand, another and the wand was back in its sheath. It wasn't that useful, yet, so he didn't intend to rely on it. His other magic was also ready. His rings worked like a wand and he had ofuda already written and tucked into his pockets and up his sleeves. There were also quite a few in his wrist band.

All the gaki lined up to bow to him as he made his way through the barrier. They stood, arms at their sides, and bowed in proper Japanese fashion. He bowed slightly, once, just before he stepped through the barrier.

He stepped into noise and confusion such as he had never seen before. He was used to the crowds and noise of Tokyo but this was different in a subtle way. The steam engine chuffed softly, people called to each other, rowdy children ran about. He looked around for a moment then stepped toward the train.

It was a lucky thing he did so as a crowd of red headed people poured through the barrier, talking loudly.

"Now, Ron, you know what Dumbledore said. Poor Harry is bound to be confused and frightened. You just make sure you befriend him." The mother pushed Ron toward the train, followed by a red headed girl and two more red headed boys. These boys were twins. They cast apologetic glances at Yusuke and trundled a cart holding several trunks in the direction of the train.

Yusuke resolved to keep away from Ron and his red-headed family. They were too loud for him. He also wasn't happy with the fact that Ron had, evidently, been instructed to befriend him by someone untrustworthy.

He made his way through the crowd toward the train.

It didn't take him long to board and find a compartment. He thought about sealing the door but decided against it. He didn't really want company but he was going to need contacts. And he wondered if they were all going to be self-serving idiots. He settled back in his seat and lit a cigarette.

He was nearly done when the red head opened the door and glanced in. He started to enter but Yusuke challenged him with a glance, sunglasses winking. He grimaced then said, "Sorry. Can I come in? Everywhere else is full."

Yusuke doubted that but didn't say so, he just inclined his head and pointed to the least desirable seat, the one next to the door on the pocket side. "Sit there, if you like."

The boy frowned but settled in the seat. He cleared his throat then said, "Um ... Ron Weasley. Thanks. You?"

Yusuke shrugged, "Gomen. Sorry." He sorted through forms and decided against any form other than a simple, "My name is Miyamoto Yusuke."

Ron looked at the self-possessed boy and wondered at him. He couldn't be older than Ron but he acted much older. "Um ... hi. Do you know ..." He cleared his throat nervously, tugging at his collar. "Nice suit."

Not feeling that this needed a reply, Yusuke just nodded and lit another cigarette. He pulled a kunai from his space and began flipping it in his hand.

Ron's eyes bugged out. He'd never seen anything like that, knives just popping out of empty air like that, most wizards needed something to transform into metal.

Yusuke just raised one eyebrow at him and put the kunai away. They sat in silence with Ron Weasley squirming once in a while. Yusuke smoked another cigarette before the door opened again.



This time it was a hesitant boy of their age with dark brown hair and brown eyes. His demeanor was almost timid. "Is it alright if I come in? All the other compartments are either full or have ... um ... people I don't get along with in them."

Yusuke could tell that Ron was going to send the boy away, but he felt sorry for him so he just nodded and motioned to a seat opposite to Ron.

After the boy got seated Yusuke said, "Ohayō gozaimas. Watashi no namae wa Miyamoto Yusuke des." he got one odd look, from Ron.

The other boy just said, rather hesitantly, "Ah! Oai dekite ureshī des. And that's the limit of my spoken Japanese. Sorry. My name is Neville Longbottom."

Yusuke grimaced, "Warui. I forgot. Smoke?"

Neville refused politely. Yusuke lit yet another cigarette and sighed the smoke out his nose.

Ron glanced from one boy to the other then asked Neville, "Malfoy give you a hard time?"

Neville shook his head. "No, it was Seamus and The Twins. They're pranking everyone so it's not like I was singled out. But I'm just not in the mood. We're Fifth Year and ... well, they're Seventh. They should have outgrown that shit by now."

Ron nodded, looking weary. "Yes, they should." he agreed, "But at least you didn't have to use detection charms on everything you put in your mouth all summer. Mum was ready to murder them by the first week home."

Yusuke perked up a bit at that. "Who? Can I help?"

Ron shook his head in disgust. "No, but thanks. Mum would really go spare if I murdered my twin brothers. No matter how annoying they are. And ... well, the trouble is ... they really don't mean anything by it. They just have no ... discretion or something. They think it's funny so they think everyone else will too. Sometimes they just get too rough."

Neville nodded his agreement, then commented sourly, "They just don't have any idea that anyone might take their pranks amiss. I'm just glad they don't prank Ginny."

"Yeah? Well, they do. She's the only one who can get away with hexing them back without it escalating into all out war." Ron settled back in his seat grumbling about the unfairness of it all.

Yusuke just subsided into his seat, chiding himself for his offer. He knew better than that. If you were going to do murder, you were better off to keep your plans to yourself and just do it. A secret told was a secret old.

The third interruption came almost immediately after. The door rattled for a third time and Yusuke rolled his eyes. Surely the damn train wasn't that short of compartments.

The girl who stuck her head in the door had bushy hair, but beautiful eyes with heavy brows. Her cheekbones were just beginning to find their way out of baby fat and her lips would have been full if they hadn't been compressed into an annoyed line.

Catching sight of Ron Weasley she snapped sharply, "Well? Where's Ginny? She was supposed to sit with me."

Ron replied carelessly, "How should I know? She took off with that blond from Ravenclaw, and some other girl. Leave them alone, can't you? Just because Mum is over protective, doesn't mean I have to make her miserable. Bossy."

Yusuke caught the quiver of her chin where no one else bothered to even look at her. Not the seeing look that made a difference. It seemed that his newest 'project' had just presented herself. He'd have to be very careful, his father had warned him more than once about helping people who didn't want to be helped. He was also aware that some of the people who needed help most were totally unaware of that need. He leaned back to watch some more.

After a quick, catty exchange with Ron, who lost, the girl started to slam the door.

Yusuke stopped her with a soft, "And now that that little exchange is over, you are?" his rather cold tone indicated his displeasure with

her rudeness as well as that of both Ron and Neville for not introducing her.

She flushed and said, "Oh! I'm so sorry. I didn't see you clear over there. My name is Hermione Granger." She gave him a nod.

"Miyamoto Yusuke. Please, either come in and sit down or ..." He let his voice trail off and waited to see what she would do.

"I was supposed to sit with Ginny Weasley, Ron's sister." She gave Ron a pointed look. "But she went off with some friends, so now I'm sort of stuck." she stepped into the compartment and dropped a heavy book bag on the floor. "Malfoy and his bunch crowded into the compartment I was in, and I had to leave. And it's not like they didn't already have a compartment. But could they leave me to study in peace? Oh, no, they couldn't. They're looking for Harry Potter. He's supposed to be on the train somewhere." She settled with a scowl.

Yusuke sighed, a fussy one. Her tone of voice was bossy, fussy and a bit whiney. In other words, she had hectoring down to an art. He lit another cigarette, as he wondered if it was worth it, getting involved. He nearly jumped as a shrill squeal interrupted his contemplation.

"Eeuw! Do not smoke in here. Don't you know that cigarettes cause cancer. And you're endangering us all. Put that out." She drew her wand.

Yusuke had no idea what she was about to cast, he wasn't about to let her cast anything. As he summoned her wand to his hand, his ring glowed slightly. "I'll smoke if I like. Don't ever cast on me ... ever. Do you understand?" His cold fury left everyone in the compartment on edge.

Hermione because she knew it was wrong to cast spells on the Express. Ron and Neville because they'd both seen the look in Yusuke's eye, the one that convinced them that he'd just as soon kill her as look at her.

Ron shook his head. "Granger, you're ... so muggle. Wizards don't get cancer. Not from smoking, not from anything. Nor emphy ... that lung disease that you were whittering on about last year. And, if you were going to cast aquamenti on him ... well, it's just stupid. Go stick your nose in a book."

Hermione immediately sniffed in offended dignity. "Well, if you're going to be that way, just get cancer. See if I care." And with that, she dragged a huge book from her bag and stuck her nose in it.

Neville gave Yusuke an apologetic shrug and grimace, while Ron just sighed and rubbed his face. Yusuke offered Ron a cigarette and was refused. He continued to smoke, but he did open the window to draw the smoke out. He considered what had just happened, and decided to keep an eye on things before he jumped into something. Reconnaissance was not his strong point but he was fairly good at it.

Now, Hermione had one guilty pleasure, that was going to change the course of things considerably. Just not right now. It seems that the thick book she was reading was a magical composite. She'd copied her reading materials into one large volume that she hoped would keep her in her favorite series for most of the term, if she rationed herself. She ignored the smell of smoke until her nose forgot about it.

Yusuke refrained from smoking after the one he was smoking burned down to a butt. He tossed that out the window and asked, "What do you do around here for entertainment?"

Ron glanced at Neville who just moaned, then said, "Go ahead. I'm going to read the Times." and with that rather pithy comment he dragged a newspaper out of his robes and started to read.

Ron launched into an explanation of gobstones, which he declared for first years, exploding snap and Quidditch.

Yusuke brightened at the mention of exploding snap, anything that allowed for explosions couldn't be all bad. Gobstones sounded boring but Quidditch? That sounded like fun. He wondered if a broom would fly as fast as his oar.

They were interrupted by a soft exclamation from Neville.

Ron turned and asked, "What's wrong?"

Neville folded his paper carefully then said, "Just reading about that murder in Tokyo. The one where that herbalist got ... er ..." he cast a

look at Hermione then flicked his eyes to Yusuke. "Someone gutted him. It's really nasty."

Yusuke held out his hand for the paper which Neville hesitantly handed over, saying, "It's really gross. They put a picture in. It's not magical but it's still bad."

After one glance, Yusuke shook his head. "It's not murder. I don't know why the Tokyo PD is saying it is. It's clearly a case of Seppuku. This man must have had ... I don't know the English. Great courage ... to commit Seppuku without a kaishakunin." At their puzzled looks he explained, "A second. Someone to cut off his head so he wouldn't suffer. Unless he was persuaded to commit jumonji giri for some reason." He looked at the picture again but he couldn't see much. The man had fallen over forward when he finally passed out.

He was a bit surprised when the Granger girl didn't demand an explanation, instead, she made a tiny whimpering sound and looked decidedly green. Neville was the one who demanded explanation.

Yusuke shrugged then explained, "Jumonji giri is when the person cuts both ways and then just waits to die. This guy didn't do the vertical cut, probably didn't have the strength so he only cut once. It was enough. Nasty way to die. I can't tell if he's ..." Yusuke decided to avoid unnecessary questions and just shrugged again. "Reporters." He made a disgusted face. "I wonder if ... but ...hummm." He blinked when Hermione made a small squeak. "Never mind."

Yusuke settled back to think. He knew the man, or rather, of him. He was connected somehow. And a Yamaguchi would never remove himself from the gumi without permission. Something wasn't right here. He decided to leave this up to his father. After all, what could he do from here?

He was startled out of his contemplations by a soft, "Excuse me." then Hermione left the compartment with one hand over her mouth. Yusuke looked after her for a moment then just gathered up her book and some papers and put them into her bag. She returned to the compartment and sat back down next to Neville. He handed her a potion, which she took without question. Ron just sneered at her.

Yusuke noted this as well. Ron, it seemed, couldn't make up his mind about Miss Granger. Neville, on the other hand, seemed to be her friend. Yusuke wondered at that, but, per his usual behavior, didn't ask any questions. He would keep his eyes and mind open to all possibilities just as he'd been taught.

.

As the train made its way through the land, Yusuke sunk into boredom. Now, anyone with any sense knows that a bored minor mage is not usually a good thing. So Yusuke spent his time charming his glasses to shift through a spectrum of different styles of lenses. Clear, rose, dark and one style which allowed him to see as if they were clear but kept them mirrored or dark at his whim. He also charmed them to protect him from Occlumency and blinding spells.

He looked up from his fiddling when the door rattled and a voice called, "Anything from the trolley, dears?" Yusuke stood to see what was available, but turned away when he saw that there was nothing but sweets. He wasn't fond of Western sweets, except for chocolate, and he was very particular about that.

After looking things over he politely said no and returned to his seat.

Hermione also avoided the sweets, taking only a cup of tea in a covered mug. Ron took several packets of crisps and a strange octagonal box about the size of the palm of Yusuke's hand.

Ron extended the box to Yusuke, saying, "Here. It's a chocolate frog. Just don't let it jump out the window or something." Yusuke eyed it, but Ron tossed it into his lap. "Go ahead. I know what it's like not to be able to afford something extra. I worked for a farmer all summer so I could have pocket money this year."

Yusuke realized that Ron thought he didn't have money, not that he wasn't interested. That had been nice of him, and Yusuke wasn't about to insult his generosity by refusing. He bowed from the waist, rising from his seat a bit to do so. "Domo arigato gozaimas Weasley-kun." He opened the box and snatched the frog out of the air before it could do more than start its jump.

His startled expression made Ron chuckle a bit and Hermione giggled. "Is it alive?"

Hermione shook her head. "No. it's just a spell that lets it jump once. Some of them also have a hop or two. It's just chocolate. Try it, it's very good. But if you want really good chocolate, you have to try Honeydukes, it's the best ever."

Yusuke took a bite of the frog, and smile slightly. "It is good." He finished the frog, thanked Ron again and thanked Hermione as well. Good manners were cheap, and kept people from realizing just how good he was at what he did.

He thought back to his first face-to-face kill. It had been a man who had insulted his father by refusing to stop interfering in business. The protection offered was real, if expensive, and the man had tried to take over. It was the second business that Yusuke had been given.

He'd been twelve but already an accomplished ninja; his magic, along with intensive training, had seen to that. He smiled a bit as he remembered Genji leading him through Kata after Kata each more difficult than the last. It had taken him six months to master the intermediate Kata of Aikido and Shinkendo and a year to master the laido. But he had. He'd also learned how to throw almost anything throwable.

Genji-san had set up the operation and helped him to locate his target. He'd also explained the psychology behind what had to be done. One big show would save many lives. It was a case of completely annihilate one man, or spend months, if not years, putting out brush fires. And Yusuke, as Kumicho, had to do it himself.

And so he started on his second mission. This one a bit easier than the last, and much harder. Easier because he already knew where the target was and how to get to him, harder because he had to kill him in as messy a manner as possible. He just politely invited the man to practice tameshigiri with him, as the target. He didn't even have nightmares later. The man had threatened his Father and Family.

Yusuke shook himself out of his thoughts as the train whistle blasted for attention. The voice that came from nowhere announced that

they had five minutes until they reached Hogsmeade Station. He watched in amusement as Neville and Ron dragged open robes on over their uniform of dark grey trousers, white shirt, grey vest and school tie. Hermione wore similar clothing except; instead of trousers, she wore a skirt and long socks, both in grey. He glanced at the socks again, finding them peculiarly tight.

It was a bit more than five minutes before they reached the station, but Yusuke didn't mention it. He just watched in amusement as his companions scrambled around, getting their possessions back into their bags.

They arrived at the station in a cloud of steam and a clatter of feet disembarking. Yusuke waited until everyone else was off the train then he followed at a leisurely pace. He wasn't about to embroil himself in the mad scramble of bodies seeking their way to the school.

"Firs' years. Firs' years, over here!" The voice was deep and quite loud.

Yusuke looked in the direction the voice was coming from. He saw a man who stood head and shoulders over even the tallest of seventh years. He towered over the first years like a redwood over an aspen. He was obviously at least half giant. Yusuke wandered in that direction, wondering why the first years would go in a different direction to the rest of the students. He decided to follow and see.

The path was narrow, but Yusuke was pleased to see that it was cleverly designed to give the illusion of danger without any actual danger involved. A small girl slipped and nearly fell, but he caught her by the arm. "Sah! Easy now." He held her until she gave him a grin. He followed a bit more closely and helped here and there until they reached the dock. He saw the tiny boats and shook his head. Not for him, thank you. But he was pleased with the view of Hogwarts he was granted. The first years wouldn't be able to see it until they went around the low spit of land between the dock and the lake proper, but he was just tall enough. He smiled, the place was a castle and quite beautiful with all the windows alight with golden light. He turned to find his way back to the carriages he'd seen the older students boarding.



When he got back to the station the last carriage had just left. He grumbled a bit at that, but decided that they allowed plenty of time for a bunch of rambunctious kids to get into the carriages before they left. He reached into his mallet space and pulled out his traveling oar. It would get him to the castle just fine and he wasn't worried about getting lost, all he had to do was either follow the carriages or head for the lights.

He mounted side saddle to preserve the crease in his trousers, settled his coat more securely around his shoulders and drifted off after the last carriage.

He enjoyed his ride very much, the gates were huge wrought iron affairs and the view of the castle from the drive was impressive. He even liked the front courtyard, although he wasn't sure what the inhabitants had done to the place as it didn't resemble any castle he was familiar with. He shrugged mentally and braced himself for his introduction to the English Wizarding World. So far, he wasn't much impressed. In fact, he was more than a bit annoyed. First they force him to come then they basically ignore him until he found his own way. All in all, he wasn't impressed with anything, so far.

He found the front courtyard full of milling children and decided that he was better off out of it. His reflexes could be dangerous. One unexpected bump from behind, well, he didn't want to kill someone by accident. On purpose was something else entirely. He eased into position beside the huge main doors and watched with interest as the chattering clumps finally broke up and the students got themselves into the Great Hall.

He followed as far as the Front Hall then he looked around for some place to sit. Not finding one he pulled a small folding chair from mallet space and settled down to wait. He'd know when the sorting was finished.

This was one thing he'd learned about from Hermione. A hat? He wondered vaguely how it knew then decided, since Hermione had said that it was self-aware, that he'd just ask it.

As he waited, he reviewed everything he'd seen and heard.

.

Minerva McGonagall was not in a good mood. Albus was being his usual annoying self. Harry Potter was returning to Wizarding Britain, but Albus refused to tell her what he looked like now, or when he was actually arriving. She hated surprises, especially Dumbledore's.

When she saw the first years, she realized that Harry Potter wasn't among them although, on consideration, she didn't see why he should be. He was, after all, a fifth year. She put the stool down and placed the Sorting Hat on it, then she motioned to Professor Flitwick and, when he came over to her, whispered, "See if you can't find Mr. Potter. As you can see, he's not with the first years."

Fillius nodded and eased over to the wall, slipped down to the back of the room and out the door into the entry hall. He opened it to find a young man sitting on a folding chair, smoking a cigarette. He fixed a smile on his face and walked up to him.

He wasn't fond of new muggle-born students, not because they were muggle, but because they stared at him most rudely.

"Mr. Potter, I presume."

Yusuke looked at the quarter goblin and said, "I suppose. I am Miyamoto Yusuke, but my English name is Harry James Potter."

Professor Flitwick nodded, pleased that the boy didn't stare. "I see. Which do you prefer?"

"Miyamoto. I'm not sure whether to make a point of it, or let it be. I'd be interested in your thoughts on the matter, sir."

The professor shook his head then apologized. "I'm so sorry. Where is my head? Professor Fillius Flitwick, Charms."

Yusuke stood up, bowed with the proper deference and said, "Miyamoto Yusuke, Kumicho."

Flitwick nodded then rubbed his chin in thought. Yusuke waited patiently until the professor got his thoughts in order. Finally he said, "Trying to get everyone to think of you as other than Harry Potter is going to be an exercise in futility. Save your arguments for other things. Get those students who become your friends to call you Yusuke as a nickname. And a test of their intentions. You see?"

Yusuke did see. "I do. Thank you for your advice, Flitwick-sensei." He realized that getting people to call him what he liked was truly a litmus test of true friendship, as opposed to hero worship or self-serving attachment.

Flitwick, who was vaguely acquainted with Japanese through his dueling, just smiled and remarked, "We'd better get inside before Minerva has a fit. The first years should be done by now. I'll just ..."

Yusuke smiled down at the friendly professor. "Why don't you go take your place. I'll just wait here until you open the doors for me. Yes?"

Professor Flitwick wondered a bit at what the boy had planned, but who was he to steal another man's thunder. He made his way back to the head table with a slight smile on his face.

.

Albus Dumbledore waited impatiently for the first sight of young Harry. He knew he'd made a serious mistake trusting the Dursleys to take proper care of baby Harry, but he just hadn't ever thought of family not loving family. He was also afraid that forcing the boy back to England was not going to endear the wizarding world to the boy. He'd just have to wait and see. He returned his thoughts to the new bill before the ICW.

The whole room startled when the doors banged open, slamming against the back wall and sticking there. Standing in the opening was a slender figure with long raven black hair in a high tail. He was wearing an elegant suit with a duster slung negligently over his shoulders. His highly polished Gucci shoes made no sound as he walked down the center aisle toward the dais where the head table sat. All the students stared and whispered which Yusuke ignored with aplomb. He stopped and bowed slightly to the table.

He decided not to hide the fact that he wasn't as comfortable in English as they might expect.

He was saved from having to introduce himself by the tall older lady. She called him up to the stool in front of her and said, "Come now, Mr Potter. Sit on the stool.." she flicked her wand to reinforce and

heighten it. "and I'll put the Sorting Hat on you. It won't take a moment."

Yusuke settled on the stool and allowed the hat to be lowered onto his head.

"Well, well, well. Very different."

Yusuke started. "Who's there?" he was careful to keep his voice soft.

A voice replied in his head, "Why the Sorting Hat, of course. Who were you expecting? Merlin?" the tone was amused, a bit condescending, but not in any way hostile.

Yusuke replied, "Merlin? Who's that? No, never mind, I just remembered. What now?"

The hat, it had to be the hat, replied, "Now, I sort you. So. Hummmm. Where to put you. Very different from what I expected. Loyal, but you'd destroy Hufflepuff in a day. Intelligent, yes, yes, but ... Ravenclaw is definitely not for you. They'd drive you to distraction in seconds. Slytherin? No, no, you'd kill someone before weeks end. So, Gryffindor is the house your parents were in but I'm not sure that would be good either. Where would you like to go?"

Yusuke thought about that for a moment, then said, "I don't really care. Somewhere where I can ... the least annoying place? Or the most interesting. I really don't want to be here at all."

The hat carefully pushed its probe a bit deeper. It usually didn't have to go this deep but this boy was complicated. "I see. You're very mature for your age and an accomplished ... Assassin? Heavens, what have you been doing?" it probed deeper still. Yusuke shifted uncomfortably but allowed the intrusion. What was a hat going to do to him after all? "Ah! Yes, yes. I see. Let me think a bit."

Yusuke allowed the hat exactly ten seconds before he asked, "And how do you speak Nihongo so well?"

"Thoughts have no language, boy, now hush. This is very difficult." The hat went back to its ruminations while Yusuke settled to wait.

It finally announced in the confines of Yusuke's head, "I think Gryffindor would be best. It is where everyone expects you to be. You're certainly brave enough." So the hat shouted, "GRYFFINDOR!"

Yusuke stood up, took the hat off, put it on the stool and looked around. His eye was immediately caught by Hermione Granger and two red-headed boys waving him towards the table they were seated at. He strolled over, stuck his coat in a spare space, to goggling eyes, and settled between Hermione and one of the twins.

He looked up then down the table. Seated nearby he saw Neville Longbottom. Neville took it upon himself to introduce him to the rest of the sixth year students and a few fifth and fourth years as well. Yusuke did his best to remember faces and names but was relieved when Neville said, "But don't worry too much about remembering everyone. Just ask when you forget. Now. Food." with that, food did appear on the table, much to Yusuke's surprise.

He was also surprised to see some of his favorites situated near him. The rest of the food was standard English fare. Not something he was fond of, most of it was too heavy for him.

The two red-heads, who were brothers to Ron Weasley, eyed a platter near them then Fred, or maybe George, said, "It's raw. Shouldn't you send it back? The elves forgot to cook it?"

Yusuke shook his head, but Granger butted in. "No, it's sashimi, it's supposed to be raw."

Yusuke just helped himself to some of everything he recognized, and let Granger explain what was on each plate. He was interested to see that everyone nearby tried something, most of them took a cooked form of sushi, but Hermione Granger and Neville Longbottom each took sashimi and knew how to eat it. He filed that away for further examination later.

.

Dumbledore was shocked when Harry entered the room, he seemed so cold and distant. When he gave Professor McGonagall a slight smile as she put the hat on his head, he was slightly reassured.

Professor Flitwick was reminded pleasantly of his dueling days. This young man knew how to make an entrance. He was looking forward to having him in classes.

Minerva McGonagall was a bit shocked by her new student, in more ways than one. He smelled of tobacco and cloves, and he was very polite from what she could see. His small bows proved that he'd been raised in an old family. But there was something about his cold self-possession that worried her.

The rest of the staff all thought he looked very elegant in his muggle suit and coat. His long hair suited him.

Severus Snape was in a quandary. He'd been ready to hate the son of James Potter, his old nemesis, but this boy didn't look much like him. Instead, he looked astonishingly like Lily.

Dumbledore finally dismissed the students to find their rest.

.

Authors Note.

A galleon is not a dollar. Too many stories treat it as if it was. By my math, taking into account boring things; a galleon is worth about 30 dollars. So a Sickle is about a dollar. And I checked just now, a Yen is worth 1.24 cents. So a candy bar costing \$1.75 would cost 141 Yen.

The pattern book in Madam Malkins is not like Simplicity or McCalls. It's a book with artistic renderings of what the robes look like.

Yusuke is pronounced

y oo s - k ai

y

oo

s

k

ai

yes

food

so

key

pain

You might find a sound clip on a Yu-Yu Hashuko site

Yusuke followed the rest of his housemates up staircase after staircase, most of them moving. He didn't approve of this at all, especially after someone named Dean Thomas admitted that he'd fallen off one in first year and broken his leg. His cheerful, "But Madam Pomfrey mended it in no time." wasn't reassuring at all. He was well aware of skele-grow, but he was also aware of its shortcomings.

The real problem was that, if you didn't get enough vitamin D and Calcium, you robbed other bones for materials to mend the broken one. It could leave all your bones fragile. Yusuke wasn't fond of some of the other effects either.

He listened to the short lecture on remembering the password and not counting on someone else to let him in. The fat woman in the portrait nodded her head and said, "And no foolishness with me either. Now, go in." and with that she swung aside to allow everyone to enter.

Yusuke looked around the common room and shuddered. It was very English, decorated in maroon and mustard, chairs, couches and tables of various sizes were scattered around in groupings obviously intended to encourage studying. He thought it would encourage socializing instead. He was glad he'd gotten the trunk he had. He was going to have to have a private place to study, this noisy room was totally unsuitable. However, it did look like a nice place to socialize and make contacts.

The Head of House, Professor McGonagall, gave a short speech then pointed to the stairs off to the right. "There are the boys dormitories. Mr Potter, you will find that it is impossible for boys to enter the girls dorm. However, the girls may enter the boys from 7am to 8pm." Yusuke gave her a disbelieving look. "I know. It's ridiculous. To continue, you will be rooming with Neville Longbottom, Ronald Weasley, Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnigan. They will be happy to show you how to go on." With that, she turned to the first years and began assigning them to a prefect who was to help them get settled. Yusuke followed his roommates up the stairs.

The room at the top of the circular staircase was not what Yusuke was used to. He was used to his six-tatami room with its wood floors, sliding shoji and clean lines. What was revealed when he entered



his new quarters was a circular room crowded with five beds, four trunks and a mess of stove and coal.

Neville glanced around and realized that all the elves had done was push all the old beds over a bit and add one more. He sighed and turned to Harry. "I'll help you, if you want. Um ... that's my bed, there's Ron, Dean and Seamus. That leaves you with the one farthest from the door. We can shift stuff around a bit, if you like."

Yusuke nodded absently while he looked around. His bed was against the far wall and the shape of the room left a perfect place for his trunk behind the head. This would make it possible for him to leave it in place and just shut and lock it. Rather than having to keep it at the foot of his bed in trunk form. He hadn't been looking forward to constantly laying it down and setting it back up again.

He nodded again, this time at Neville. "Thank you, Longbottom-kun. This will be fine." He looked around more carefully, then said, "Although, it is exceptionally dirty." a wave of his hand pulled all the dirt and cobwebs into a compact ball. He looked around then said, "Finnigan-san, please open the window." Seamus, wide-eyed at this display of wandless magic, thrust the window open and got out of the way. The ball of dirt whisked itself out. "Arigato, Finnigan-san."

Seamus didn't recognize the language so he just said, "Excuse me?"

"Ah! Warui. Thank you." Yusuke decided he needed to start trying to think in English again. "Sorry. My English is not as good as you might expect. I had EASL teachers but only for a few hours a month."

Seamus and Dean both just nodded their heads agreeably. Ron Weasley looked a bit indignant then said, "What? You don't speak English? How come? You are English."

Yusuke just shrugged elegantly and said, "I went to Japan very young. I learned quickly and well. I don't use English in my everyday life. I speak Nihongo daily." as he was speaking, Yusuke moved to put his trunk in place. He turned it on end, or upright, depending on your point of view. He opened it and emptied his pockets into a basket in the storage compartment. He knew he had to sort some

things out but he could do that in the morning. Then he shut it, opened it to the clothing section and took out a yakuta for sleeping.

Ron grumped and grumbled a bit, then announced, "You can't have a compartment trunk. Hogwarts rules."

Yusuke just snapped, "The rules say I can't have a trunk with a compartment that creates an enclosed room. This trunk contains a study area, a storage area and a wardrobe. That is all." He didn't bother to tell them all the things in his storage. His opinion was it wasn't their business.

Neville nodded, he'd wanted something similar for his newest trunk, but his Gran had turned him down. Seamus and Dean both looked suitably impressed and didn't push the issue.

Yusuke nodded to the room, not quite a bow, but close. "I am going to bathe. I believe privacy is required here?"

Neville shook his head. "It's rather communal, but we try not to get in each other's space."

Yusuke smiled slightly at Neville. He thought he was going to like this soft spoken, kindly boy. "Arigato, Longbottom-kun." He was going to see if he couldn't put some starch in the boy's spine. It would be good for him.

"Do itashimashte, Yusuke-san." Neville drew on what he knew from his experience in Japan and smiled back.

Yusuke took himself off to bathe, put on his yakuta over a pair of boxers and returned. He did another cleaning spell on his bed and climbed in. He'd slept in Western style beds before and was used to them. He wasn't that fond of the odd curtains all around it, but decided he'd get used to them. They might be very useful in keep him from waking his roommates with an almost all night reading session. As he'd gotten older his need for sleep had decreased from four to six hours down to three or four. He used the hours to study, read, do business or workout.

He settled against his pillows and quietly listened to his roommates as they horsed around, eating candy and telling stories about their summers. He was very sure no one would like to hear about his.

.

He'd been eating breakfast when one of the kyōdai had hurried in and told Musashi that there was an invasion on one of the far islands. Urup was one of the islands that the Yamaguchi-gumi claimed as their own. The Russians disagreed.

They invaded the Yamaguchi Northern Possessions from time to time, trying to claim them for Russia. The Japanese government ignored these proceedings with a stoic, "There's nothing we need to do about it. Mobsters fighting mobsters." But everyone noticed that they made sure that anyone injured got the best of care and Russians were imprisoned on various trumped up charges, smuggling being one.

The kyōdai had given coordinates and Yusuke had called his men to him. They'd mounted their oars and soared off into the sky, flying North at an incredible rate.

It took them half an hour of flying at top speed to get to the area where the Russians had made their forward camp. This was situated near a small lake at the far northern part of the island. It was a good place to camp as the lake was in a depression, which sheltered it from off shore winds. But, this also made it hard to defend as attackers could get the higher ground.

It didn't hurt that it was nearly inaccessible by mundane means. The only way in and out was by flight. And only oars were small enough to get in due to the thick growth of trees.

They had flown in like a murder of crows, devastating their foes in seconds. Yusuke had been in the lead of a triangular formation that cut a swath of death through the camp. No one escaped their wrath. This was their territory and no one, no one at all, was allowed to invade without facing consequences.

Yusuke had finally flicked the last traces of blood from his katana, and wiped it on the shirt of the one man still living. The soft ring of the sword entering its saya sounded loud in the clearing. Yusuke just looked at the man, the commander of the group, until he was a whimpering mess.

Yusuke glanced at his two seconds. "Suggestions."

Someone called out, "Cut out his tongue."

Yusuke just looked at the wakashu until he began to sweat. "And why would I do that when I want him to carry a message? Baka!" He turned away, knowing that the wakashu was properly chastised. He returned his attention to the commander. "You! You will return to your Oyabun and tell him that the next time he encroaches on our territory, I will come for him. Do you understand?" He kept his voice soft and low, but the man paled even more than he already had and nodded so hard he nearly gave himself whiplash.

The man had been sent on his way after a beating that left him nearly unconscious.

Miyamoto Musashi had received an apology from the Russian Mafia boss a day later. It had included some very nice vodka and caviar.

.

Yusuke was pulled from his memories by Ron, who asked, "And what did you do for your summer?"

Yusuke smiled around, looking somewhat like his namesake, Shinigami, and said, "Not much. Worked out, did kanji exercises, entertained my father, killed a few people. The usual."

Neville turned a bit grey, but Ron, Dean and Seamus scoffed at this with various degrees of rudeness. Yusuke just shrugged, tossed a few bits of paper around and announced, "I'm going to sleep. Don't bother me. And don't tamper with my trunk, you won't like the results." A wave of his hand closed the curtains. He would spend four hours reading his books, then sleep until dawn.

The other's grumbled a bit at that rudeness, but Neville remarked, "I don't think he's kidding about his summer. And there's something about the way he talks ... but I can't put my finger on it." He sighed. His memory was just as bad as ever. "I'm tired from the train ride, and it's going to be a long day tomorrow. I'm going to bed too. Good night." And he also went to bed.

Dean, Ron and Seamus stayed up a while longer, talking about Harry Potter, and wondering about where he'd been and what he'd really been doing. They all remarked on his attitude of faint contemptuous hauteur.

They all slept the night through.

Yusuke awoke as the first rays of dawn's light shone in the window. He eased out of bed, then grimaced. The silencing spells had blocked the sound of Weasley's stentorian snoring. Neville wasn't too bad, but Dean and Seamus both made a back up of hoots and whistles that would keep a deaf man awake.

He decided to do his exercises before showering and dressing for the day. The only problem was, where to go. He decided to call for a servant to see if they could find him a dojo.

"Service please." Yusuke was a bit startled by the oni who showed up. It was about a third of his height with huge eyes and flapping ears. It was dressed in a clean garment of cloth draped around its body. It touched him gently with a delicate long fingered hand.

"You is not being calling a house elf, young sir. Students is not being allowed."

Yusuke put his cards on the table, figuratively speaking. "I don't want to be here, I have other things to do. But your ministry threatened to steal my inheritance if I didn't come to this place. So ... I'm not in favor of following rules that are ... inconvenient. I will try not to make things difficult for you."

The elf made a rude face. "Do not be calling it my ministry. They is all busybodies. What is you needing?"

"I need a place ... a dojo. To work out in. And I don't want to be running all over this drafty pile of rock twice a day. Can you help?" Yusuke dipped his head in a slight bow. He was always fairly scrupulous about his dealings with servants. They had a hard enough time without him adding to it, and he found that a modicum of politeness got him excellent service.

The elf nodded, ears flapping. "Yes, there is a salle. A place for sword fighting. Very big. Very open. Is this helping?"

Yusuke knew exactly what a salle was. "If it's a big one. Show me, dozo."

The elf led him down the stairs, saying politely, "Dizzy is this one's name, not dozo. This way please"

Yusuke decided to let that go in favor of finding the dojo sooner.

The elf, Dizzy, led him through the common room and out the portrait guarded door. They turned left at the first landing and were faced with a short corridor with a door at the end. But, instead of going to the door, the elf turned right, facing a blank wall. "Here we is, sir. Just touch the wall with your magic. If you is acceptable to the salle, you is being let in."

Yusuke put his hand on the wall and reached out with his Chi, the door slid open with a soft sound of wood sliding on wood. The elf disappeared with a soft pop and Yusuke walked in to the salle.

He wondered why the elf had called it a salle as it was obviously a dojo, complete with a matted area surrounded with tatami then encircled with benches padded with thin cushions.

One wall contained a huge rack of weapons, from tanto to tachi, to naginata and a heavy spear. There were shelves full of gi, shirikin and throwing pins, rope and chain darts and sectional whips under them.

It was divided in the traditional manner into quarters. One quarter was the matted area and one was another area surrounded by a low divider made like a banister. This area contained zafu and zabuton with attendant small tables scattered over the area. The other two were a changing area and an area with exercise machines.

These machines were surprisingly modern in appearance, but Yusuke wasn't that surprised. It was more or less like the dojo he had at home. He would later find out that Hogwarts elves had set this up just for him. Miyamoto's arm was very long indeed.

Yusuke reached into his mallet space and pulled out his hakamashita and hakama as well as a fundoshi. He put them on, tossing his street clothes into mallet space, and started with some

tai chi to warm up with. He worked his way through his kata, starting with simple laido and moving through more and more complex kata then on to shinkendo kata until he finally carefully sheathed his sword and knelt, sweating and panting on a zafu to rest a moment before moving on to a yoga cool down. This was followed by half an hour of meditation.

He returned to the dorm just in time to see Weasley blown across the room. He sneered and said, "Tampering with my things is not a good idea. I did warn you, didn't I?"

Ron stumbled to his feet with a snarl. "Potter! You're not allowed a multi-compartment trunk. Hogwarts rules."

Yusuke just shrugged. "So? Do I really care? I was dragged here. I don't want to be here. I'd much rather still be in Japan, but your ministry threatened to confiscate my inheritance if I didn't. So here I am, under protest. Deal."

Dean and Seamus had been pleased to realize that they were going to room with The-Boy-Who-Lived, but now they weren't so sure. This elegant young man wasn't anything like what they'd expected. He was harder, colder and certainly much more mature than anyone else their age that they'd met. Neville just sighed, this was not going to go well.

Yusuke for his part, wasn't that thrilled with his roommates either. They were, to his eyes, very immature, frivolous and silly. Neville was the best of the lot, only because he was shyer than the rest.

Ron just glowered then mumbled something about telling Professor McGonagall. Yusuke snorted. He really didn't care if someone went and complained. But, he wasn't about to tolerate that attitude for a moment.

"Yes, please do. If you want to wake up with a canary in your mouth. I don't like tell tales, it isn't good for business. Nor your reputation. And what are you without that?" And with that final remark, he turned to find clean clothing for the day. He absently dragged his dirty clothing out of mallet space and dropped them into the hamper behind his trunk. He pulled off his hakama and pulled the hem of his hakamashita down to his ankles with a quick spell. Then he ambled into the bathroom. He didn't mind taking showers, but he was going

to want a real bath now and then, at least twice a week. He decided to ask a house oni about it.

For now, he satisfied himself with a long hot shower, put his hakamashita into his mallet space and dressed for the day. He'd decided on a compromise uniform, comfortable BDU pants with soft soled combat style boots specially made for him and a t-shirt with kanji on it. He tugged his robe on over this and left it open. Since he was wearing a t-shirt he left his Beretta in his wardrobe. He kept his other arms as his throwing pin sheath looked like a bracer and his wand sheath looked like a wrist band. He kept his kunai in the wrist sheath and his balisong in his pocket. He stuffed a tanto into his left boot and headed downstairs for breakfast.

.

His entry into the common room was greeted by what seemed to be a huge sigh of relief. He glanced around suspiciously, wondering what the hell was going on now.

A small voice piped out, " Harry Potter. You're going to save us all from You-Know-Who, right?"

Yusuke just blinked at the small boy for a moment. He started to get nasty but realized that the kid couldn't be more than what they called a second year. He just shrugged and said, "I have no idea what you're talking about. I know who?" he shook his head irritably. "No, I don't know who. And who the hell are you?"

The boy looked astonished then said, "Oh, I'm sorry. My name is Michael Porter You-Know-Who., I mean ... um ...He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Him. You're going to protect us from Him, right?" Michael looked confused, upset and afraid.

Yusuke sighed, "I don't know who you're talking about. I was raised in Japan. I have no idea what you expect of me." He started to turn away, but waited a moment to see if someone would explain things to him. If not, he was going to have to find out some other way. If they were expecting protection, he had to know the particulars.

The soft muttering of most of the house followed him out the door with Michael's voice a shrill counterpoint. As did Hermione Granger.



"Yusuke, wait for me." Yusuke, who knew he had to start thinking of himself as Harry, or he wouldn't answer when called, turned to smile at her. "I know all about this. I'll tell you what I know over breakfast. Ok?"

"Yes, that would be good. You could call me Harry, if you like ... I think." He let his distaste for the name change show on his face.

"I'll rather call you what you like. Is Yusuke-kun ok?" Hermione thought it would be fun to address him by his Japanese name.

Harry, he firmly admonished himself to remember that, said, "That would be nice. Thank you. I shall call you Hermione-chan. Yes?"

"Oh, I'd like that. Now. What do you know? I'll start from there. And..." She flushed. "If I get TMI on you, tell me. I do tend to lecture." She sighed heavily. "Most people here just tolerate me, I know that. But I just can't help it. If someone is doing something wrong, they could get hurt, or hurt someone."

Harry bowed slightly and offered her his arm on the stairs, he just didn't trust stairs that moved on their own to be safe. "I'll tell you. But I know absolutely nothing about any of this. All I know is that I am a legacy to this school, and, if I don't attend for the next two years, the Ministry of Magic of Britain will take my inheritance. It's a lot of money. Bad for business. I would just let it go myself, but my adoptive father Miyamoto Musashi asked me to come. So ... I did."

Hermione thought about that as they navigated the first flight of stairs. "Oh. Um ... I'm not sure that is legal. But with this Ministry? It really isn't unusual for Fudge to pull a fast one, or two. So ... You're the Boy-Who-Lived." And with that, she spent the rest of the walk to the Great Hall telling Harry/Yusuke about himself.

At the end, all he could do was ask, "And how do they know all that happened that night? It doesn't make sense."

Hermione blinked for a moment then said, "Well, everyone knows ... but ... Well." She frowned in thought, nibbling on a piece of bacon.

"Exactly, Hermione-chan. I don't know who 'they' are, but the solid facts are ... Voldemort found out where my parents and I were. He broke in, killed my parents then disappeared. I was found with a cut

on my head. I'm pretty sure I didn't do much at the age of fifteen months. Especially since I was completely unable to defend myself from my uncle only weeks later. So ... for the sake of my sanity, let's say that no one really knows what happened and move on."

Hermione nodded at this bit of cynical wisdom and continued on to explain that there was some sort of prophecy, which no one actually knew, that he was the savior of the wizarding world or something. No one seemed really sure of this, but 'everyone' knew it was so. So they idolized Harry Potter and seemed to think they all knew him and that he owed them some sort of service.

As they settled at the table, Harry shrugged and announced, "I know all about protection rackets, and they don't get something for nothing. Trying to take my inheritance instead of paying me a proper fee is not going to get them anywhere. As long as He and his gumi leave me alone, there won't be any problems between us."

Hermione thought about that for a moment then decided that it all was something to deal with when the proper time came. "Well, that's alright then. Pass the pumpkin juice, please."

Harry handed the pitcher over, sniffing it suspiciously as he did so. Hermione poured herself some then offered. "Would you care for some, Yusuke-kun?"

He reached over and took her goblet. He sipped it then forced himself to swallow. He choked out, "No. Ahem! I don't believe so. Thank you all the same." He put the goblet back where it had been, and gulped some tea to get rid of the taste. "That stuff is way too sweet for me."

Neville had settled opposite Harry, and had listened to their conversation with interest. He now interjected himself into it by asking, "Do you know what classes you'll be taking yet?"

Harry started to answer, but was interrupted by an argument down the table.

Ron Weasley was arguing with a girl who was obviously his sister.

"You can't give that away. Mum bought it for you." Ron was holding what was obviously a journal book covered with well worn green suede.

Ginny was red faced and clearly angry. "I'll give it away, if I like. I'd never keep a journal. Any girl with six brothers who would do something like that is an idiot. Give it!"

Harry just gestured with one hand. The book flew out of Ron's grasp and bounced up and down in front of Ginny until she grabbed it. She then handed it off to a first year, saying, "I said you could have it, and I meant it. If Mum had wanted me to write in it she would have said, not just stuffed it in my cauldron in my first year." She turned to Ron. "And you leave her alone, you hear me?"

Ron mumbled something incomprehensible and returned to his breakfast.

Ginny turned to Harry and gave him a brilliant smile. "Thanks. Ron's such a prat. Can I sit with you?" Harry nodded and moved over a bit. "Imagine, me sitting with Harry Potter. Wow."

"You could call me Yusuke." Yusuke waited to see what she said.

"Why would I do that? That's just silly. Your name is Harry Potter, so why should I call you something foreign?" Ginny's evident satisfaction with this remark left several people with displeasing thoughts.

Neville thought she was shallow but he had for years. Harry thought she was stupid and obnoxious. Hermione just sighed, the poor girl would never realize what she had done, nor understand why her hero held her at arms length.

Professor McGonagall waited until everyone was finished eating then passed out the timetables. She smiled thinly at Harry and said, "Here you are, Mr. Potter. Headmaster Dumbledore saw fit to mark a few changes." She grimaced then finished, "If you see fit to agree, just initial where indicated and I'll make the changes."

Harry looked at the original timetable, it had all the classes he wanted on it. The emendations were in green and were all the

classes he had rejected as useless. He was also taking Potions, which he had not included on his original.

"The black table is the one I decided on with one difference. Potions. I did not wish to take that class." Harry handed the parchment back to the professor.

McGonagall nodded. "I do realize that but Dumbledore will not be swayed on this one. I believe that he altered your timetable in the way he did so that you would not notice Potions being a requirement. Do what you will, he'll see you in that class, damn the consequences. I'm sorry, Mr. Potter, but there's not much I can do about it." The professor looked annoyed for a moment.

Professor McGonagall was suffering from a crises of /conscious/. She knew that Harry Potter was necessary to the war against Voldemort, but she didn't like the way the ministry was going about getting him to help. Threatening a sixteen year old, really. So, she was going to go out of her way a bit for him. Even though his attitude annoyed her. Refusing the Potter name did not go over well with her. Not that she really regretted interfering with Dumbledore's plans, she was annoyed at him too. He could have done a bit more to stymie the Ministry plans, via Fudge, she was sure. But, he'd been at the ICW meeting instead of in his office at said ministry as scheduled.

While she was thinking, Yusuke was also thinking. "McGonagall-sensei, you could call me Yusuke, if you wish." He returned his attention to the parchment. "This will do, I suppose. Potions is only one more class since I'm not taking any of the other suggestions. Is there a juku here?"

McGonagall pulled her thoughts back to the present. "You will refer to me as Professor, Mr. Potter. And it would be completely unethical for me to call you ... Yusuke. I don't know what a juku is so I'm sure we don't have one. Some heathen amusement, I assume. Now ... head for your class." She handed back the parchment and strode off.

Yusuke, or Harry, gazed after her for a moment then shrugged, relegated her to the list of not helpful people and turned to Hermione.

"Well, I suppose she told me. What class do you have?"

Hermione took his timetable and compared it to hers. "We're taking all the same classes. Exactly. I'll set up a study guide and a schedule as soon as we have our first assignments." She suddenly flushed. "If that's ok by you, that is."

Harry was used to someone else making up his schedule so he just nodded, "Ah. That is fine. Thank you."

Hermione glanced at her schedule then announced, "Our first class is Charms. Professor Flitwick. Come on. Being late is one of the few things he'll take points for."

Harry eyed his schedule as he obediently followed her. After a moment he asked, "Why do we have Double Potions then a single later?"

"Double Potions is the lab and the single is review of the potion, assignment of the new chapter, question and answer and assignment review. Snape assigns the next weeks lab and we go over things. Well, he gives a review and we take notes. He's ... not much of a teacher as such. He expects us to know things. I better shut up. He doesn't like me much." Hermione turned bright red and clutched at the strap of her huge book bag.

Weasley decided to butt in just then. "Yeah, Ol' Snape doesn't like her, even less than other Gryffindors. She's a 'bloody great know it all' according to him. Called her insufferable. Takes points for breathing too loud. Git."

Hermione turned even redder. "He does. And he'll ask questions that he's sure no one knows the answer to. Just to be a ... a..." she closed her mouth, looking put out.

"Ah! Ikuzo. Na! Come on, we'll be late to class." Harry touched Hermione's bag, casting a feather light charm on it. "Why don't you do this yourself?"

Hermione put the strap over her shoulder. "Because I can never get the spell to stick to the leather. Thanks."

Harry just offered her his arm. This might not be so bad after all. He had a definite saving people thing, and loved to mix in other people's – help people with their problems. His father found it amusing.

They found their seats where Harry wanted to sit. His hand on Hermione's arm made sure that she sat where he wanted. Neville joined them on Hermione's other side. Weasley settled in front of them. Harry made a slight face at that, he was still not sure what to make of the redhead. However, he'd wait and see. Often the most useless seeming people turned out to be worthwhile.

Hermione sighed. Maybe this time she could keep a friend. She just hoped that Yusuke kept his word to tell her when she got overbearing and too critical. Then she saw who had just entered the room and groaned softly. "Malfoy."

"Nani?" Yusuke looked around. He had to stare for a second. The boy Hermione was pointing out was one of those ferrety faced sorts that only the English seemed to produce. He stood in the door for a moment, looking around with an expression of arrogant disdain. Then he moved into the room, selected a seat and settled into it, arranging his robes in a fastidious fashion that Harry found over exaggerated and silly. He dismissed him as a spoiled scion of some nouvelle rich new blood family. His heritage couldn't be more than 600 or 700 years old.

"Sou ka. He thinks he is someone?" Harry turned to look at Hermione and Neville.

Neville answered his question. "His family came over in the Norman invasion. He's stuck up and rude." He shrugged. "My family and the Potters were here before his by about a thousand years. Of course, our names weren't Potter and Longbottom then."

Hermione nodded her understanding while saying, "Well, they were but in a different language."

Professor Flitwick cleared his throat to gain their attention, took attendance then told them that he was sure they'd done their summer work so they would start by reading the first chapter in their text book. Harry opened his book and got out a yellow legal tablet and a rollerball to take notes. Hermione hissed at him but he ignored her, so did the professor.

After he was sure everyone was dutifully reading their books, Professor Flitwick called Harry over to his desk.

Harry went up and bowed to Flitwick. "Yes, Flitwick-sensei?"

Professor Flitwick just smiled at him cheerfully. "Yusuke-san, I just want to establish your proficiency. I don't want you to be at a disadvantage. I understand that you've been home-schooled?"

"Hai. Ah! Yes, I have. My father insisted that I be schooled at the Miyamoto compound, instead of putting up with the constant insults of ... I don't know the word. People beneath me in rank." After blessing Professor Flitwick with a brilliant, sincere smile, Harry dropped that for something more important. "What would you like me to do?"

Flitwick just let Harry's remarks drop, but resolved to have a talk with Minerva later. "I thought I'd just name a spell and you could do it. If you don't recognize the name, I'll demonstrate it then you can try. How does that sound?"

"It sounds very good to me. Yes. First spell?"

Flitwick started with levitation and moved on from there. He finally reminded Harry to use his wand at third year spells. When they were done, Flitwick clapped his tiny hands in glee. "Well, Mr Potter, you did quite well. I'm very pleased to say that you will be classed a good, solid sixth year. Please go back to your seat and begin to read the chapter."

Harry settled back in his seat and pulled out his book. He smiled over it at Neville, who was giving him a slightly worried look, then began to read.

When the clock tower chimed the end of class, Harry rose, stuffed his books into his bag and headed for the door. It would be easier to wait there than to try to catch Hermione and Neville in the room.

Hermione immediately began an in depth inquisition on everything Flitwick had him do and how he'd done it, ending, "Ok, so where did he place you? I hope you're in sixth year. It would be just awful if you had to go down a year. You didn't, did you?"

Harry assumed a slightly put upon expression and finally interrupted her. "Granger-chan, breathe. I did fine. I'm in sixth year. Flitwick-sensei said I was a good, solid sixth. Calm down."

Hermione took a deep breath then said, "Well, that's ok then. Neville, are we going to be study buddies again this year?"

Neville gave a deep sigh. "Like I'd pass anything if we weren't. Yusuke-chan, you want to join us? Ok, Hermione?"

Harry laughed as they walked down the stairs to the next floor. "Neville, chan is only for girls. Kun is boys. Sama, san, sensei and a few others are for either male or female. Hermione-chan? It is alright for me to call you that?"

Hermione nodded easily. "Yes, that's fine. To both questions. I did offer to make up a study schedule for us all, didn't I?"

"You did, but I don't take anything for granted and twice offered is ... better." Harry followed her, slightly to her left with Neville on her other side.

She spent the entire rest of the walk to Transfiguration talking about what they needed to know so that she could make up the most efficient study guides. Harry bore with it with a blank expression, forcing the urge to gag her down ruthlessly.

.

They found seats together and settled in to wait for the professor to appear. Hermione pointed to a cat and said, "Oh, look there. Yusuke-kun, look."

She was about to say more, but the stern voice of Professor McGonagall interrupted her. "Attention, class." Harry had to smile, the cat in the corner had become the instructor. Impressive, an animagus. He turned his attention to the professor as she began a short lecture on what they were going to cover this year.

After her lecture she gave the next weeks assigned reading and practice. Then she announced that the rest of the two hour class period would be review. Starting with last years transfigurations.



Harry was pleased to see that there had only been six. Each transfiguration was an example of a theory of transfiguration; noble to inferior, inferior to noble, living to non-living, non-living to living, hot to cold and cold to hot.

Harry managed to change silver into glass then back again without strain. He didn't notice the expression on Professor McGonagall's face when he did it with a wave of his hand. He completely forgot about the wand residing in the sheath on his wrist.

"Well, that is noble to inferior and inferior to noble. Right?" Harry looked up at the professor.

She made a slight sound deep in her throat, but was interrupted by Neville. "Yusuke-kun, you're supposed to use your wand."

Harry looked blank for a moment then produced his wand. "Oh? Fine, then. Again."

Considering that he'd never actually used the wand for anything, Harry didn't feel that he did too badly, it only took him two tries to get the silver to glass to work. He managed the rest of the transfigurations easily, except for the living to non-living. He just couldn't see turning a hedge hog into a pincushion. He listened to the professor's instructions then said, flatly, "No."

Professor McGonagall looked at him for a moment then said, "Mr. Potter, you need to turn this hedge hog into a pincushion. It's a simple transfiguration. First year's do it."

"I don't doubt that for a moment. But, is it right? What if sticking it with pins hurts it. It can't protest if it's a cushion, now, can it?" Harry wondered if the woman was cruel or just stupid. "Don't you teach Logic and Reasoning or Ethics?"

"And what do such muggle things have to do with magic, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall seemed more curious than annoyed, but Harry was seriously annoyed by now.

"Oh, I don't know." he didn't bother to smooth his snarky tone, "Ethics teaches us that doing things to living things that might cause them distress should be reserved for those that deserve it. And Logic and Reasoning teach us to think about things before we do

them." Harry eyed the woman for a moment then added, "McGonagall-sensei."

A snide voice from the other side of the room announced, "I don't think you'll be around long, Potter. Calling the Professors names and all. Where were you raised, a barn?"

Harry looked over at the blond annoyance named Malfoy and said, "No. I was raised in one of the oldest families in Japan, in a house that has stood on the same site in one form or another for about 3000 years." He eyed the boy for a moment then shrugged. "You, obviously, were raised without care or concern for your manners." He bowed slightly and sat back down.

Professor McGonagall called the class to order, her sharp voice snapping out, "Alright! Everyone sit down! Now!" She waited for them to obey then continued, "Mr. Malfoy, I don't need, nor do I want, your aid in controlling my class. Mr. Potter, if you have religious objections to live transformations, please let me know. Everyone prepare for me to review you on last years work. Now!" The class turned to their books, the Slytherins snickering slightly.

Harry thought he had a handle on who was who in his current acquaintances. Hermione and Neville were on his side, Malfoy was not. As sensei went, Flitwick was an ally, McGonagall was barely acceptable. He wondered what the rest of his teachers would be like. Dumbledore was still in his black books and not likely to get out of them. Divination, really? As for the Ministry, he was really not impressed and not likely to be any time soon. He wondered how soon he was going to really lose his temper and kill some useless piece of kategori trash. He really hated dealing with civilians.

Harry settled back to listen to Professor McGonagall lead the class through their review. He was not impressed with that either. They needed a focus to do things he'd been doing without one since he was thirteen, or younger. He watched with a distant look in his eye and a blank face. He never noticed McGonagall watching him, not that he would have worried over much about it if he had. What could, or would, she do after all?

When class was dismissed, Hermione stayed after to speak to the professor for a moment.

"Professor McGonagall? ... um ... I think you should know that, in Japan, sensei is usually translated as Professor or teacher." With that, she clutched her book bag and scurried out the door to try to catch up with Harry and Neville. She didn't notice Ron give her a sharp look.

.

Harry was making his way down the stairs to the inner entry hall when he heard a scream above him. He turned and saw a small, first year girl clinging to the edge of a staircase. The stairs had moved unexpectedly and then frozen when she slipped, to keep her from being crushed between the stairs and the landing. This did not help her much as no one near her could reach to pull her up.

It was no help that the ones who could were blocked by a mass of screaming, gawking idiots. Harry took stock of the situation and did the only thing he could, he tried to get a levitation spell on the girl but the milling bodies between him blocked that, he had to cancel the spell before he levitated the wrong person.

The only other way he could see to get to the girl before she lost her grip and fell five stories into the atrium was to climb to her. He shucked his robes and shoved them into Neville's hands. His basic cat scramble up the broad railing caused several people to scream. He made it to the next landing and had to use a tic-tac off the wall and over several heads to get across to the next flight of stairs. These left him with no choice but to return to the railing, konging off the shoulders of a boy who yelped but held strong instead of ducking. Two more jumps got him to the stairs which he leapt up three stairs at a time. He just managed to grab the girl's hand as her exhausted fingers finally let go.

Panting from the mad scramble up the stairs, Harry clutched the trembling girl to his chest and plopped down on the stairs. "Shimata!" He turned to glower at the still screaming group of gawkers. "Urusai! Baka!"

No one paid his demand for quiet any attention, but a bellow from the atrium got everyone's attention and quieted the noise. "Everybody be quiet! Now!" Dumbledore sorted the mess out easily, sending students to their classes, or to the Great Hall to eat. Then he made his way up the stairs to where Harry was still seated,

cuddling the sobbing girl. "Miss Granger, Mr Longbottom, perhaps you should be headed for your next class?"

Hermione plucked up her courage, constant contact with Dumbledore had finally quashed her hero worship although the same couldn't be said for other professors. "No, sir, we'll wait for Yusuke-kun. We're his friends and he'll need us." She took Harry's robes from Neville and helped him get them on. She noticed that his hands didn't tremble and he wasn't visibly shaken.

Dumbledore just nodded and said, "Ah, I see. Well, let's get this sorted then, shall we?"

The girl was turned over to a hovering Madam Pomfrey who took her to the infirmary for a quick once over. Madam was sure the only things wrong with her were a strained arm and exhaustion, but she wanted her in the infirmary to make sure. She checked Harry with a quick flick of her wand, and found nothing but a skinned palm. "Albus, I trust you'll see to Mr. Potter." and with that she stalked off with her charge in tow.

Harry straightened his robes and asked, very quietly, "And what, exactly, is the purpose of moving staircases that cause at least three disasters a week? Please explain this to me." He didn't look particularly angry, but the tone of his voice warned Neville that something was going to explode soon. His Gran got that tone when she was about to 'rip someone a new one'.

Dumbledore twinkled at Harry. "They're tradition, my boy. They've been that way since I was a lad. Keeps the young one's on their toes. Now. I'll heal that hand and all of you can hurry off to lunch." He flicked his wand, healed Harry's hand and wandered off, humming to himself.

Harry forcibly, obviously, calmed himself as he watched after Dumbledore for a moment then muttered in Japanese, "That fool. Someone is going to be killed, sooner or later. And he just wanders off without so much as a thank you." Then he turned to Hermione and asked, "Do you have any idea how these damn stairs actually fucking work?" Hermione shook her head no.

Neville shrugged, admitted he didn't either then said, "But it's sure to be in Hogwarts; a History. Hermione has a copy. Let's forget about it

for now. Come on, let's go eat, I'm starving. Fear does that to a fellow, you know."

Hermione huffed her irritation but Harry just patted her shoulder and tugged her along. "Me, too. I'd love a nice Sukiyaki." He didn't expect to get food like he had at home on a regular basis, but he didn't know much about house elves.

When they seated themselves the food that appeared around them was a mix of English Boarding School fare and Japanese traditional foods. Hermione nearly drooled at the sight of ramen bowls while Neville appreciated the fresh salad. Harry happily took the lid off his sukiyaki and began to eat with relish.

Hermione ate then went on her usual mission of inquiry. The Ravenclaws always knew all the assignments by lunch time so she just asked the nearest one, James something-or-other, who happily told her all the assignments for the sixth year classes, even the one's she wasn't taking. She made notes, grumbling when her quill blotted her parchment. She still hated both quill and ink, never mind parchment but what could you do, rules were rules.

She noted that Yusuke left the Great Hall, he actually waved to her before he left. Neither she nor Yusuke noted that Neville paused at the door then followed him.

.

Harry went out into the sunshine of the inner courtyard and pulled out his cigarette case. He'd refrained from smoking in the Great Hall as he wasn't about to let the professors know that he smoked. He didn't need the aggravation of having them try to stop him. He smiled a bit, most yakuza wouldn't understand his reasoning, they'd smoke and the devil take the hindmost. He, on the other hand, didn't think it would be wise to rub their noses in his real world. Let them think of him as they pleased, for now. So, he found a comfortable bench in a nook behind a large bush and settled to smoke and think.

He was pleased with his schedule, it made it convenient to keep up his skills. He could do workouts in the morning then have his afternoon free for more workout, practice on his instruments and his calligraphy. After taking care of the essentials, he could study. He was sure that Hermione would want to include his daily schedule in

her organizational efforts. He was amazed at how quickly he'd made friends with her. He'd expected to feel disconnected from all his classmates but both Neville and Hermione were turning out to be his 'specials' here at Hogwarts.

Neville found him there, eased behind the huge bush and said, "Can I join you?"

Harry offered him a smoke, but he just smiled and shook his head. "Well, sit down before you fall down. What can I do for you?"

Neville just settled on the end of the bench and replied, "You could have killed yourself."

"No, I couldn't have. I know all the levitation charms. That's what you call them, right?" Harry blew smoke out his nostrils, making him look decidedly dragonish.

"Yes, that's right. Everything is a spell. Hexes are usually hostile unless they're included in wards, then they're ... well, still hostile just not to you. And jinxes are pranks. Only some are really dangerous. Then there's charms, which are always benign. And why am I telling you things you already know?"

"Because I don't know the names for them. With us, everything is just a spell, or a curse. You forgot curses."

Neville batted at him idly. "No, I didn't. You already knew that."

Harry, well aware that Neville didn't mean anything by his back handed swat, blew out more smoke. "I did. I'm going to workout as soon as I finish this." He waved his cigarette then took another drag. "You want to come?"

Neville waved a hand in the cloud of smoke Harry had produced. "Ok. I don't workout. Gran is always telling me I'm so awkward that I'd hurt myself. I'd like to know how I'm supposed to develop any coordination if I don't work on it. It's not like it'll just appear out of nowhere. Magic can only take you so far, you know."

Harry nodded. "I do know. I can start you out on some yoga and tai chi. Simple stuff, but it'll help, if you work at it."

"I'm not afraid of hard work. It's not like running the Longbottom greenhouses is easy. I have to start late because of school but we still put out most of the high end potion supplies around." Neville smiled proudly at that revelation.

Harry nodded. "Your reputation is good, even in Nihon. My family buys from you, through a supplier in Tokyo." Harry noted Neville's smile of pride then changed the subject. "Now, what is it with McGonagall. She obviously doesn't like me, but I have no idea why."

Neville shrugged. "Me neither. And you better watch out for Snape. He hates everyone, but probably will hate you particularly. He and your Dad had a prank war of epic proportions all seven years they were here. No one is exactly sure why."

Harry thought about that for a moment then shrugged. "Ok. Come on, workout now." He led the way to the dojo next to Gryffindor.

Neville started across the floor with his shoes on but Harry stopped him. "No, Neville-kun, you take off your shoes at the door. It's even more important than in a house. You're going to be rolling around on most of the floor and sitting on the rest. I've got slippers here, if you want but bare feet are more appropriate. All exercises are done barefoot." He waited while Neville took off his shoes and socks then motioned at a stack of yoga mats. "Pick one, doesn't matter which one. I'll show you a short sequence, easy to remember, but very effective for a beginner." He found Neville a pair of yoga pants on the shelf, along with a t-shirt. He gave these to him and pointed him behind the partitioned off section. "Change in there, I'll change out here."

Neville changed quickly and returned to find Harry in an aikido uniform of white hakama-shita and dark blue hakama. Harry explained to Neville that he should put the mat on the bare floor of the section dedicated to floor work. He then began to teach Neville yoga.

Neville proved to have a good physical memory, he could remember the whole twenty asana series after two run throughs. Harry left him to his practice after telling him to go through his series twice more at his own pace then do corpse pose for ten minutes.

Harry turned to the matted dojo area and bowed to the small alter there. He pulled his katana out of mallet space and unsheathed it, putting the sheath on the tatami covered verge. After a short warm up of combined cuts he began his kata. He worked on some of his magically enhanced kata, things that only a person who'd watched movies by Jackie Chan and Steven Seagal would recognize. He happily admitted to stealing moves from Kill Bill as well. What movies accomplished by wire work, he accomplished by magic.

He was just completing a combined move of cut to head, reverse waist stab and roundhouse head kick when he realized that Neville was standing on the verge tatami and staring at him, open mouthed and wide eyed.

"Neville?" Harry walked over to him, smiling slightly at the expression on his face.

"Holy Merlin's lily white. That's ... amazing. Where did you learn that?" Neville just managed to swallow down a demand to be taught all that Harry knew.

"Nihon. Genji taught me the basics but, when Chichi-ue realized that I was good, he brought in Masters from all over to teach me. He taught me himself too. I'll start you on the path, but ... I'm exceptionally good for some reason. My reflexes and strength are well over that of men twice my age. No one has figured out why. The only thing anyone will really say is, it's genetic." He shrugged and waited for Neville to say something.

"Oh, ok. I'll learn anything you're willing to teach me. After all, who in their right mind would pass up lessons from The-Boy-Who-Lived."

Harry gave Neville such a blank look that he wondered for a moment what was wrong. Then Harry yelped, "Nani? Nani yo? Me! Nan da ... Matte."

Neville waited for Harry to collect himself. It had never occurred to him that his friend would have no idea of his reputation in England. After several seconds he realized that this revelation had been a bit more of a shock than expected so he called an elf to bring some tea.



Harry put away his sword then led him to the area with cushions and tables and settled them both on what he called a zafu.

"Yusuke-kun, don't you know anything about yourself?" Neville frowned as he realized that that hadn't come out as he expected.

Harry shook his head. "All I really know is that the Ministry called me a national hero, but no one told me why. And they forced me to come here for 'training in my obligations'. It's all bullshit as far as I'm concerned. I'm well aware of my duty to my father and family. How I managed to acquire a fucking obligation to a country I left at the age of nine, I have no idea. No one tells me much of anything. Hermione told me all about the war of Voldemort and said that The-Boy-Who-Lived was supposed to fix it all. She neglected, amongst all the information she did tell me, to tell me that I'm ... My chichi-ue would be ... displeased. I am sure that I am. So, tell."

So Neville spent the next two hours telling Yusuke everything he knew about what was going on with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, who's real name no one knew. And the political situation in Wizarding Britain. His viewpoint was completely different from Hermione's and more enlightening.

He was just finishing up when Hermione burst in, yelling. "Harry James Potter! There you are. I've been looking all over for you. What .."

Shinigami came out in force. "Onna! Do not yell in the Dojo. Where are your manners? Come sit down. And speak to me with respect. Quietly."

Hermione took one look at his frozen expression and made a noise usually written as "Meep?" She came to the seating area, shedding her shoes at the door without being told and settled siza. "I'm sorry. I didn't know you considered this a dojo. But I've been looking all over for you and I ... I was afraid. Who knows what some Slytherin might do while your back is turned."

Neville nearly snorted tea up his nose at that. He coughed a bit then allowed, "Hermione, I don't really think that's going to be much of a problem. If someone is stupid enough to hex him ... well, I hope they have their cemetery plot picked out."

Hermione gave Neville a sharp look then asked, "Really? And why is that?" She turned to Harry, "Yusuke-kun, do you practice martial arts?"

Harry smoothed his face into a blank relaxed expression and said, "I do. Aikido, Shinkendo, Iaido, Hapkido, taikwando and some others." He waited while Hermione got her grin under control. "No, we don't call it Musabetsu Kakutō Ryū but that's really what it is. Or you could call it Ninjado."

Hermione had to stop at that. "Ninjado? Really? Does that actually exist?"

Harry didn't see any sense in denying it. "Yes, it does. I am a Master of that style and Aikido, shinkendo and Iaido. I didn't bother testing in any other styles. It pleases Chichi-ue to watch me compete." He didn't bother to tell her that he had been competing, at his own request, since he'd earned his first mastery at the age of 13. And he was surely not going to tell her that he had started competing in mixed martial arts cage fights in one of the clubs his father owned shortly after that. Especially since they included weapons.

While he had been distracted by his thoughts, Hermione had been setting out their project planners and schedules. "Ok. Here's a day planner for each of us. I've got project pages for each subject as well as due date cues. There's a monthly page with weekly addenda. Then there is one fold out with a timeline at the top where we can put due dates with notes for everything that's due for the whole term. Any questions?"

Neville looked lost and nodded. "I have no idea what you just said. What about the old way, the way we've used for the last five years?"

Hermione sighed. "Neville, how many times have we both lost something important because we kept all our schedules on individual bits of parchment?" Neville just shrugged. "Fine. What don't you understand?"

"Um ... most of it. Who's going to keep all this up? Not me, you know. I'll have mine completely fouled up in no time."

Harry just examined the pages then nodded. Hermione had already established his timeline and schedule as far as she was aware of his

classes. "This is very good. I'll add in the rest of my schedule so that you won't schedule a study session when I need to be doing something else. Are they self-updating across the board or do we have to update each one individually."

"Individually. I don't know any charms that will work on more than one location. But, if you write something on a daily page it transfers to all the other pages. And turns red if you already have something on a different page." Hermione managed to look just a bit smug.

Harry nodded. "I know a spell that will link all our schedules so that what we write in one will appear on all the others. If I charm the timeline pages and the project pages, that'll keep us up with each other while allowing us to keep private pages. Yes?"

Hermione nodded. "That's a great idea. Here." She put all three books together. "Do you need them individually or on top of each other."

"On top, onegai." She piled the books and pushed them toward Harry. "Arigato."

It only took him a moment to charm the planners. Then he wrote his exercise and practice schedule in his book. It transferred perfectly.

Hermione looked at his schedule and said, "My goodness, Yusuke-kun, you do keep yourself busy. Are you sure you're going to be able to keep up?"

Harry just smiled. "Come on, let's go back to the common room. I want a smoke. And, yes, I'm sure I can keep up. Chichi-ue has given me a pass on keeping up with all my studies because the mail is impossible. I'd have to send my work to Gringotts, they'd send it on to Japan, Tokyo U. would grade it, sent it back to Genji-san, who'd send it back to me along with my new assignments. There's a ten day turn around but I'm only allowed a week to do each assignment. Not good. I'd always be late. Not good. So I get a pass until I'm back in Nihon. Then I have to play catch-up." He shrugged.

After putting on his boots, he led the way out and back toward Gryffindor. Hermione had a very thoughtful look on her face, Neville just followed along after his friends.

As they got seated in a grouping around a table, Hermione said, "I notice that you're using muggle biro's and paper. We're not allowed. We have to use parchment and quill. It's a royal pain. I have to get everything made special for the new schedule books. Although the covers are much nicer."

Harry got a smug look and pointed to Hermione's book bag. "Hogwarts; a History, page 436. and I quote; 'All assignments must be turned in written on fine grade parchment, written with a properly trimmed and sharpened goose quill, with pure ink.' Not a word about notes, private work, outlines or preliminary copies." He smirked as Hermione dove into her book bag and emerged with the book. It didn't take her long to find the passage in question.

"Oh, man. You're right. I'm so embarrassed. This is just great. Now ... I need to write to my Mum ..."

Harry lit a cigarette, dragging in a lungful of smoke he said on his exhale, "I have all that. And highlighters, flags and pointers. I had a gaki pick all that up and stock my trunk so I'm not sure what else is there but I'll give you some of whatever you want. And a fountain pen. I don't think anyone will be able to tell the difference between a chisel point nib and a goose quill."

Hermione calmly took Harry's cigarette and walked off with it. She headed for the stairs to the boys dorm, calling over her shoulder, "Come on, then," before Harry could do more than say, "Oi!"

He followed Hermione, laughing softly to himself. He was sure there would be an outcry at Hermione's invasion of male territory and he was right. But it was Seamus Finnigan who objected, not Ron Weasley as Harry had expected. His objections cut off abruptly when he saw that not only was Harry giving him a cold look, Neville looked annoyed as well. No one was really worried about him doing much, but he was old family and had proper manners. Seamus was well aware that offending him could bring about some very unpleasant things.

Neville was polite to a fault and shy as they came, but a word to his Gran was the kiss of death more likely than not. So, Seamus retreated to his bed and watched the proceedings with a bemused expression.

Harry opened the storage compartment of his trunk and waved a hand at it. "Help yourself. If there's not enough left, tell me and I'll send for more."

Hermione dove in and spent several minutes opening different bins. "Ok. I'll take one spiral notebook for each class for notes and a couple of yellow tablets for essay prep. Biro's and a mechanical pencil. And ... fountain pen and ink cartridges. A pad of sticky notes and a folder of sticky flags and some sticky points. Yusuke-kun, can you think of anything else?"

Harry had finished his cigarette while she was poking around but he lit another before replying, "No, not really. And feel free to ask me for more of anything you need. You are going to need more, if you're going to keep up with three people's schedules."

Hermione started to turn away but something caught her eye. "Oh, what's that?"

Harry glanced at the box she was pointing at then said, "A calligraphy set. Just a small one as I won't have time to do more than keep up my practice. There's only four brushes, an ink stone, stick, mat and some weights. The paper is in the next bin down. If you like, I'll show you next time I have it out." Hermione started to protest but Harry reminded her, "You'll just have time to put that stuff away before dinner. And I'm starved."

Neville chuckled softly, "You're always starved."

Hermione just left in a flurry of hair and robes to put her booty away before time to eat.

.

One thing. (yes, another Authors Note) There's not going to be a huge cast of characters. I have a hard time keeping track of them all. There's going to be Harry, Neville, Hermione, Ron, Draco; Some McGonagall, Snape, Flitwick and Lockhart. Dumbledore will show up now and again as will various other canon characters, but I'm not going to have them all be around a lot. Most of the adults will be in and out. And remember, Harry is NOT a nice boy. He smokes, kills people and swears.

Another thing: If you do not have Private Messaging enabled I cannot respond to reviews.

In the staircase scene, Dumbledore asks if Hermione and Neville shouldn't head for their next class. I'm well aware that they were headed for lunch. Dumbledore just assumes that they have a class because he isn't keeping track of who has what when. I've had teachers do that to me. Go to your next class when it was lunch or tell me to go to the wrong class.

Someone pointed out that I haven't been posting translations of the Japanese. If I miss something, it's easy enough to look it up. But here:

"Nani? Nani yo? Me! Nan da ... Matte – what? What the fuck? (different form of) what ...wait.

There are several names for father – chichi-ue, Otouto, otousan, oyaji and no rhyme or reason for use that I can see.

Musabetsu Kakutō Ryū – anything goes school. From Ranma ½

Many people have asked for this.

OyabunOyabun (Godfather)Oyabun

The Oyabun is the ultimate leader of the Yakuza, which means his decisions and orders are final and everyone beneath him in the organization must obey him. The oyabun only stays in contact with members working directly under him.

KumichoKumicho (Supreme Boss)Kumicho

Directly under the Oyabun there are only two men, one of those is the Kumicho. This is also a great leader and he is in charge of all tactical and financial business of the Yakuza.

WakagashiraWakagashira (Underboss)Wakagashira

The other leader working on Oyabun's side is the Wakagashira. He is in charge of other leaders as well as all the gang members within

the Yakuza. The Wakagashira has much street knowledge and experience.

Saiko KomonSaiko Komon (Senior Adviser)Saiko Komon

The Saiko komon is a personal advisor for the Kumicho and the Oyabun. He is also in charge of the tactical and defensive agencies.

So-HonbuchoSo-Honbucho (HeadQuarters Chief)So-Honbucho

The So-Honbucho is an operational leader within the Yakuza. He is in charge of Yakuza's logistics agencies.

Fuku-HonbuchoFuku-Honbucho (Regional Boss)Fuku-Honbucho

The Fuku-Honbucho is an operational leader within the Yakuza. He is effectively in charge of all the Yakuza gang members. They are at his service and are willing to sacrifice their lives to complete any task the Fuku-Honbucho might order.

ShateigashiraShateigashira (Captain)Shateigashira

The Shateigashira is Yakuza's captain and he works for the Fuku-Honbucho as his assistant. The Shateigashira is the direct leader of all the gang members within the Yakuza.

Waka – foot soldiers

Gaki – new recruits

The evening went well. Dinner was eventless, except for another complaint from Ron Weasley about uncooked food. One of his twin brothers told him to stuff himself before they did it for him. This shut him up so the rest of the table could enjoy sampling the Japanese fare.

The return to the common room was accomplished in a clump that made Harry nervous. He wasn't fond of being surrounded by strangers. He did manage to have all of them enter first, he really hated having strangers at his back.

When they all got inside, Hermione grabbed a chair at a round table in a corner. She motioned for Harry to sit in the chair in the corner. He appreciated that as it protected his back. Neville took the chair on his other side without comment and they spread their work out.

Harry consulted his timeline and decided to read the chapter on potions that they would be covering the next day. Potions was not one of his strong points. He had no hand for it and so, he studied the theory and left the actual brewing to one of the three potions masters his Chichi-ue employed. He settled in to read, absently taking notes on a yellow tablet.

Hermione did the same while Neville struggled with ink, pot, parchment and book. He wrestled with them for a while then gave up with a small, frustrated cry. "Damn! I'm not even going to be able to read these notes tomorrow. And I hate potions. Snape hates me."

Hermione didn't even look up when she barked, "Language, Neville and it's Professor Snape."

Neville started to knuckle under, but Harry said, mildly, "What the fuck is your problem, Hermione-chan? If Neville-kun doesn't like him, what difference does it make what he calls the man. Is he really that bad?"

This led to Hermione ranting about respect for teachers and authority figures for just long enough for Harry to understand her attitude. Neville just kept his silence until Harry told her to stop ranting like a maniac and think. She snapped her mouth shut with a sour expression on her face.



"If the man is as bad as Neville-kun says, he doesn't deserve respect. Respect is earned by the wise, expected by the foolish. This Snape sounds like a bully and a fool. He has not earned respect. I wouldn't call him Snape to his face, but what we call him between ourselves is not his business. Tell me more about him."

Neville took a turn ranting. He told about the insults, sarcasm and bias; point taking and outrageous punishments. "Breathing too loud! Really! That man hates kids. What he's doing teaching? I don't know. But Dumbledore stands up for him all the time. And sneaks points back for stupid stuff like having a nice book bag." He subsided, muttering about greasy gits and demented headmasters.

Harry added this to all the things he needed to think about. He wasn't sure but that Dumbledore was senile. The man was over one hundred and fifty after all. His father would have retired him by now. And he was Supreme Mugwump of the International Conference of Wizards; although why they called it that, he wasn't sure. It only involved the European Wizarding Group after all. Added to that, he was also Head of the British Wizengamot. The man had a triple helping of work on his plate and didn't seem to know the meaning of the word 'delegate'. Harry shook his head to himself, if he had run his businesses the way Dumbledore ran the ICW, the Wizengamot, and Hogwarts he was pretty sure he'd be offering yubitsume before the month was out.

He silently returned his attention to his book. They studied quietly until a nervous first year approached them.

"Um ... excuse me, Mr. Potter. Could I have your autograph. Please. Colin took this picture and ... and ... well, I'd like you to autograph it for me. Please?" He extended the picture timidly.

Hermione sighed. She hoped that Harry was nice to the poor kid.

Harry took the picture and looked it over. It was taken in one of the hallways. He was caught in mid stride, just finishing his step, he turned his head and looked directly into the camera, raised an eyebrow and it started over. "Not bad. But you tell that Colin person that, if I catch them taking a picture without asking first, I'll be ... unhappy. And you won't like me much when I'm unhappy." Harry produced a brush pen and signed in both kanji and romanji. He pointed to the kanji and said, "That is my Japanese name, which I

prefer to go by. And that..." He chuckled. "is obvious. Now, go finish your homework." He was sure that he was going to lose his temper sooner or later, but not just yet. One sign of how truly ruthless he could be was how strictly he controlled himself. He had to watch his attitude too. It wouldn't do to put useful people off by acting like a yakuza, although it annoyed him no end to have to watch his speech and mannerisms so closely.

The boy clutched his photo and scurried off. He showed it around to his friends before going to his dorm to put it away.

Hermione took one look at Harry's expressionless face and said, "That was very kind of you, Yusuke-kun."

Harry just looked at her for a second before saying, "I know. Strange, isn't it?" He got up, graceful as a tiger, and headed for the stairs, remarking over his shoulder, "It's getting a bit busy in here for me. I'll be at my desk if you need me. Excuse me." Hermione noticed that he moved as silently as one of the ghosts. Neville noticed Ron Weasley's assessing gaze.

It wasn't long before Ron got up too, and went after Harry.

Harry was already settled at his desk, happily reading charms. Ron cleared his throat and asked, "Why don't you like me?"

Not bothering to look up from his reading, Harry replied, "What's to like? Dumbledore told you to befriend the 'scared little boy'. I'm not scared, nor little, nor a boy. I'm a kumicho of the Yamaguchi-Miyamoto ninkyo-dantai. I resent the whole idea that I need befriending like a stray inu. Go away." Harry put every bit of his yakuza attitude into this speech.

Ron ran a hand through his hair, this was not going well at all. "Damn it. Mum has a voice like a banshee. You would have to overhear that. I told her, and Dumbledore, that I'd be your friend, if you wanted. If you don't want to be my friend, I understand. But I have no intention of peaching on you. I'm no suck up. To you, or Dumbledore. So ... just wanted to clear the air. I'll leave now."

Ron turned away to go back to the common room.

Harry turned, putting his book down. "Tell me something." He forced his temper down. It wouldn't be convenient to have an enemy in his dorm room, right at his back. And his gut was telling him to have patience.

"If I can."

"Why won't you call me Yusuke?" Harry really wanted to know why it was so important that he change the name he liked to one he barely remembered and which had bad connotations.

"Um ... well ... Your name is Harry Potter. The Potters are a pure-blood family that goes back more than 1700 years. Seems like you'd like to be associated with something like that. I guess." Ron scrunched his nose up in thought. He wasn't comfortable with this young man, his eyes were way too old and his attitude screamed dangerous.

"I see. I have no pleasant memories of the time I was called Potter, and boy, and freak. I have very pleasant memories of the now, when I am called Yusuke, Oujisama, kumicho, and so on. Why should I wish to be called a pejorative?" Harry watched as Ron digested this.

"Oh, well. Ok. I guess. But a lot of people aren't going to understand. And ... I dunno, just doesn't seem right somehow." Ron rubbed the back of his neck, turning red. "Not that you should change a name you like just for a bunch of strangers, but ..." Ron stopped talking before he wound up with his foot in his mouth.

"I see we think a bit alike. I am not going to make a thing of this. But people will be judged on their insistence that I bend to their will. And not favorably. Those who truly wish to be my friends will call me what I like to be called. Wakarimasu ka? Um ... do you understand?" Harry pinned Ron with a hard look.

"Yeah, I get it. Don't want it, but I get it. I better get back down before the twins come up to rescue me. They're convinced that you'll murder us all in our sleep." Ron grinned as if he was sharing some great secret.

Harry just snorted, then said, "Not without warning you first. Now, I have charms to read. If you'll excuse me." And he returned to his book, ignoring Ron's startled expression and leaving him to go back

downstairs, and tell his brothers that he was going to murder their Mum when he got home.

.

The next morning was a repeat of the last. Harry got up, worked out, meditated and cleaned up. He got dressed much as he had the day before, but with a green t-shirt and wandered down to the common room to wait for Hermione and Neville to join him. He didn't like Hogwarts much, but he did have to admit that he thought he was going to enjoy having a friend his own age. Two would be even, better but he wasn't going to get too hopeful of Hermione just yet.

Neville, on the other hand, was turning out to be useful. His calm, phlegmatic viewpoint was not only amusing, but also helpful. His acidic comments on several of their classmates made Harry laugh quietly to himself. He was also quiet happy to warn Harry about those who would be less than friendly just because of House affiliations. Common sense, it seemed, was in short supply. It was extremely foolish to make enemies without reason, and which house you were in seemed a really stupid reason to pick enemies.

He looked up from his thoughts as Hermione came down the stairs, heavy bag over her shoulder. She couldn't seem to understand that she didn't need every book she owned with her all the time. Harry froze for a moment, unless there was some good reason.

"Hermione-chan, why do you carry all your books all the time?" At the look on Hermione's face, Harry was sure he wasn't going to like the answer.

"Um ... Yusuke-kun, don't make a big deal, please? It's because my roommates tend to 'borrow' my things and damage them. Mostly my books." She looked at Harry's face and hurried to say, "I have protection charms on everything else. Professor Flitwick and Professor McGonagall helped me learn them, and I renew them weekly."

She started to say something else, but Neville's voice from the stairs interrupted her. "I wish I knew something really nasty to put on it. I'd hex them so bad. No one in the boys dorms is so ... petty and malicious. They'd get a fist in their face for sure. I'm ... a social outcast. I know it and don't let it bother me much. But they don't ruin

my homework, tear my clothing and steal my ... stuff. It's just not done. Girls are ... different. If they were guys, I'd be punching someone."

Harry just snorted. "Next time you need your charms renewed, bring your trunk down and let me do it. And here ..." He reached into his mallet space and dragged out two black Japanese style book bags. "Use these, both of you. They have expansion charms, sorting charms and weigh less charms."

Hermione frowned at the bag. "Weigh less? Oh, you mean feather light charms. I'm not sure I should ..." She thought for a moment then shrugged. She was allowed to be greedy once in a while, she decided, after all, she was keeping track of all his assignments and project timelines. "Well, thank you. Um ... Domo arigato gozaimas, Miyamoto-san. Is that right?" She bowed, a little too low, but it was a great attempt.

Harry bowed just right and replied. "Do ita shimashte, Granger-san. Very good."

Neville didn't trust his Japanese, he'd noticed Yusuke's slight wince when he tried it, so he just said, "Thank you very much. I really appreciate it."

Harry shrugged one shoulder. "You're welcome. Now. Let me show you how they work. The sorting charm is a bit particular. You have to know the title of the book you want or it'll push out all the books on a subject. Either way is good. And it'll hand up pens by color or type." Hermione frowned but Harry told her. "And they're keyed for English or Japanese. I had them made in advance. You'll have to prick your finger and apply a drop of blood to the locks or it'll work for anyone. Once keyed to you specifically, they'll shock the hell out of anyone who doesn't have your express permission. And you can't give someone blanket permission, only works once, then you have to give permission again each time."

Hermione looked worried, blood was dark magic. "Um ... Yusuke-kun, I'm not sure about this. Blood magic is pretty dark stuff."

Neville sighed. "Hermione, the only blood magic that's dark is the sort where you take the blood without permission, or kill the donor.

This sort is ... warding magic. The Ministry uses it all the time themselves."

Hermione gave Neville a suspicious look, but gave in under his long suffering expression.

"Well, what do we do? And why do you have these already."

Harry just shrugged, "Giri. You barbarians don't practice it, but I do."

Neville sighed, he'd have to find a gift for Harry now, and what to get him was going to be a problem.

Hermione efficiently pricked her finger and put a drop of blood on each lock, then helped Neville do the same. Harry watched with interest as the locks glowed blue for a second then clicked.

"Ok, that's done. Come on, I'm starved and, if we don't hurry, all the good stuff will be gone." Neville swung his bag onto his shoulder and led the way down to breakfast.

After breakfast it was Potions Double. In other words, they were expected to brew a potion. Hermione was of the opinion that it was a test of how much they remembered from last year. Neville just said he was doomed no matter what.

Harry just shook his head. He'd gotten a good look at Potions Master Snape at breakfast. The man was unpleasant, at best. He had a sour expression, an appalling personal appearance and a stiff and commanding air. Harry decided that he'd wait and see what kind of teacher he really was. He was well aware that many students would call a stern teacher a bully out of ire and spite.

The fact that he favored his own house above all others, including taking points unreasonably, was a bit worrisome, but he was still going to reserve judgment until he had more facts. After all, some people considered him a cold-blooded killer. He thought of himself as a good manager and a proper son to his father. He looked after his family, businesses, and friends carefully.

The walk to the dungeon classroom didn't take very much time. The door was locked when Harry tried it and Hermione informed him,

"Professor Snape lets us in when he gets here. I think he doesn't trust us to be in the room unsupervised. I don't understand why."

Ron Weasley said succinctly from behind them, "Twins. Weasleys. Got a clue?" His sour expression made Neville snicker quietly.

Hermione sighed. "George and Fred. I swear, if they weren't so charming, I'd hex their bits off. Permanently. But ..."

Harry cleared his throat in warning. Snape was coming. He'd heard Ron walking, the sound of his steps echoing off the stone walls, but all he'd heard of Snape was the soft rustle of his robes.

The professor paused a moment, waiting until the students moved out of his way. Harry waited just a moment too long, forcing the man to stop until he cleared a path. The two of them gazed at each other for a second. Harry's clear eyed stare matched with the older man's obsidian glower. It would have been a stare down but Harry bowed slightly and stepped out of the way, murmuring, "Professor."

Snape gave his new student a considering look as he flicked his wand to unlock the door. He didn't look that much like James, in fact he had Lily's eyes and her crooked lower lip. His long hair was nowhere as messy as James' disastrous bird's nest. But there was something very dangerous about the boy, his spy sense was screaming at him to be careful. The last time he'd ignored that sense he'd made a very foolish mistake. One he was still paying for.

"Enter."

Harry followed the professor into the room and glanced around. What he saw was a rather dank and dark potions classroom. The jars on the walls didn't bother him at all, as he was used to seeing much more disturbing things. The smell bothered him a bit, as some of the ingredients seemed to have gone off.

All the benches and tables were a bit grungy, and the floor was badly stained from spilled potions. The neat desk at the front was backed by a flip blackboard, which was badly cleaned. All in all, he was not impressed.

Hermione and Neville eased him into a chair at their station while Ron and Seamus took the one behind them. All the other students

got settled under the stern glower of the professor. Harry noted that the Gryffindor and Slytherin students didn't sit together; or even near each other.

Harry set out his pen and tablet, then fished in his bag again for his book. He muttered, "Potions Text, English, Sixth Year." and the book popped to the top of the bag. He opened the book to the page on the chalkboard and settled himself to listen to the lecture.

But Professor Snape didn't lecture. Instead, after snarling, "Today, I'll be asking questions on the summer work. Not that I expect any of you dunderheads to actually have done it." he began snapping questions at students he selected seemingly at random. He skipped Hermione despite her frantically waving hand.

Harry finally caught it gently in his own and pinned it to the table. "Please stop that. It's very distracting and he's obviously not going to call on you. Content yourself with the knowledge that he's quite sure you've done your work."

Hermione mumbled, "He never calls on me."

Ron grumbled quietly, "Good thing too. You natter on for ages over nothing."

Professor Snape heard him and snarled, "Mr. Weasley, do you have something you'd like to share with the class, or are you just disrupting us for the fun of it?"

Ron flushed and shook his head. Neville nudged Harry in the ribs, hissing, "See?" Harry wasn't sure what he was supposed to 'see', but he filed everything he saw away for later meditation.

His attention was dragged into the present by a snide voice near his ear. "And what does our new celebrity know? Hummm? Shall we see?"

Harry didn't jump nor even flinch, instead he turned his eyes in the professors direction, slowly turning his head to glower back at the sour faced man. "Hai?" Harry was going to play the 'no speaky Englishru' card on this man.



"I take it that is a less than polite 'yes'." And with that he began to pelt Harry with questions about potions, never giving him time to answer properly.

After six questions in quick succession Harry interrupted him, "Shitsureishimashita, Kyooju."

Snape just snarled, "None of that. If you don't understand the question, the proper response is, 'I don't understand the question.' not that foreign babble. And I suppose that you consider yourself above brewing?" He sneered, ready for some smart answer.

He was to be a bit surprised by the answer. "No, not above. Why would I waste perfectly good ingredients brewing my own potions when it's a much better idea for me to have someone who is really good at it do it for me? I've no hand for it and would never dream of ruining a potion and possibly poisoning myself or blowing up something. Explosions are all well and good but not in a volatile environment like a potions lab." Harry gave up on the 'no English', he wasn't going to be able to sneak that by this one.

Snape raised one eyebrow then said, in that silky tone that boded no one good, "Well, you'll brew here, or you'll fail. Do you understand?"

Harry replied in a voice that returned the threat, "Oh, yes, I do." He countered Snape's raised eyebrow with one of his own.

Snape purred, "And what would you say if I told you that particular bit of insolence would cost your house twenty points?"

"Nani?... Ah, points. Why should I care about that? I don't want to be here, I'm sure Dumbledore told you that. So ..." He offered an insolent shrug. "I wouldn't be that upset. Perhaps you would care to expel me?" He managed a wide-eyed, hopeful look.

Snape growled something that sounded like 'Detention' wrapped his robes around himself then barked, "Begin brewing."

As there was an odd number of students, Snape decided that Harry should be seated with Hermione and Neville. Ron had moaned at that and declared that they were all doomed. Hermione had simply told Neville to not touch anything then given him a notebook and told

him to write down everything she said to. Harry had taken the pen, uncapped it and shown Neville how to write with it.

Evidently, word had spread amongst the staff about the new note taking paraphernalia as Snape didn't say anything about it. Snape, for his part, didn't care one way or the other, what essays were written with or on, they were still sure to be horrendous.

The class passed quickly as everyone bent their heads to their brew. Harry prepared ingredients to Hermione's specifications. She dropped, dipped and stirred. Neville scratched away industriously and the hour was done.

Professor Snape collected the bottled samples from each group then banished most of the potions. Some he cast a stasis on, saying that they might be usable in the infirmary. As they all scrambled for the door he said, "Potter, stay behind."

Harry just stayed in his seat, an expression of polite inquiry on his face.

Snape glowered at him for a moment then forced down his obvious ire and walked over to sit on the edge of the table he was facing. Hip shot with one foot dangling he waited for Harry to break and say something.

Harry, for his part was already used to being interrogated by police officers, which he called okami or satsu, who didn't care much about his tender years. He just waited Snape out, mildly examining his fingernails.

"Damn it, boy, you will ..."

Harry cut him off. "Do. Not. Call. Me. Boy. My name is either Harry Potter or Miyamoto Yusuke." the searing look he shot at the professor made the man hiss.

"Insolent. Arrogant. Self-centered." Snape ran out of steam as he saw that Harry wasn't particularly bothered by this diatribe.

"Yes? And? Please continue. Although I'm sure I've been called much worse by others. It is interesting to me to see that you seem to know me. Even though we've never met. To my knowledge, that is.

Perhaps I've simply forgotten?" He paused to think a moment. "No. I'm sure I would have remembered someone as ... tall as you. Not to mention the ... garments. And hair. Very ... limp." He stood up abruptly. "I'm bored now. Sayonara, Snape-san."

Harry walked to the door and, without turning his head said, "I really wouldn't do that. Teacher hexing a student? Not so good. Yes? Dumbledore-dono probably wouldn't like it." He shut the door after him, very quietly.

Snape blinked at the door for a moment, recovering his senses. His shock at Harry's behavior had held him paralyzed for several moments before he nearly gave in to the impulse to hex him.

Harry's Japanese had an odd accent that he couldn't place – yet. He was also nothing like his expectations. He was proud, arrogant and insolent. But he didn't seem to be possessed of that sense of entitlement that had led his father into bullying and pranking. Snape didn't think he had to worry about Harry being a prankster, he was much too cold and calculating for that. He was going to keep an eye on this one for sure, just not for the reasons he'd intended at first.

.

Hermione and Neville both pounced on him the second he shut the door.

"Are you ok?"

Hermione's demand was nearly drowned out by Neville who asked, "What did you say to him? He looked like he'd swallowed a spider."

Ron, who was hovering uncomfortably in the background, gulped loudly.

Harry shrugged negligently, stuck a cigarette in his mouth, lit it and exhaled before saying, "We had a meeting of the minds. I hope. He won't attack me and I won't kill him. He didn't like my accent either. Hope it gives him nightmares."

He sauntered off, smoking. Lunch would be starting in about fifteen minutes, and he was hungry. He wondered what delights would be offered today.

He politely ignored Hermione as she rather shrilly demanded to know things that were not her business. Neville finally told her that she was getting excessively loud and much too demanding. Then he looked surprised at himself. He'd never done such a thing before.

Ron just sighed. This was not turning out anything like he'd expected. Of course, he should know better than to listen to his Mum even long enough for her to suggest befriending Harry. She was a wonderful lady and a good mother, she just got an idea in her head and no one could shift it out.

Harry smiled to himself. Neville was rapidly developing a backbone and Hermione was going to learn that the only reason he'd let her get away with her bossy ways was, he was too polite to protest. He was still withholding decision on Ron until further information was available. He did seem like he was embarrassed by his mothers scheming. He really wanted to meet that woman.

After another delicious lunch, they went to the library to study and work on their essays, except for Ron who announced that he wasn't going to spend the last of the good weather in a library. He chose to go flying instead.

As they spread their things out, Harry asked, "Does no one run any sort of juku here? This is stupid. How the hell are we supposed to really study if we spend half our study time moving our things from one place to another." He sorted through various bits of paper, trying to find the one he wanted.

Hermione nodded, "You're right. Madam Pince will toss us out on our ears at exactly five and we can't come back until seven then we have to go again at nine. We have so many afternoons off because we're sixth year and expected to do more self-study than the younger years so that makes it even worse. All the moving around interrupts my train of thought and my notes..." She stopped speaking and shook her head, obviously distressed.

Harry wasn't that happy either. He was used to having an actual office, both at the headquarters in Sapporo and in the compound. He'd had to quit studying in his rooms when his homework got complicated enough that putting it away all the time got him confused. His Chichi-ue had been very proud of him when, at the

age of twelve, he'd worked up the nerve to ask for a permanent study place. He already missed his office.

Neville scowled at his notes, something was knocking at his brain, as his Gran said, but he couldn't bring it to the front. He shuffled his notes for a moment, grumbling, "Exactly. And with all the empty class rooms and such ..." He grabbed the thought before it could run for cover. "Listen. Why don't we just claim an empty classroom for ourselves and sort of ... I'm not sure. Fix it up to suit ourselves and ... lock it somehow? Just so no one steals our work. See?"

Harry nodded and started putting his things away again. "I do. There's several right there in Gryffindor tower. Not the dojo. It's not appropriate for what we want but there's at least three huge rooms in that same hall. They're all filthy, I peeked in to see what they were. And they're stuffed with broken things. But ... we can pick one and move the stuff from it to the other two, banish it or fix it up to use. What do you think?" He looked at Hermione who already had her nose buried in *Hogwarts: a History* to see if there were any rules against it.

She shuffled pages and mumbled for a few moments then looked up, bright-eyed and flushed. "There's no rules against it. All the rules say is that it has to be an unused area that doesn't interfere with the proper running of classes or school affairs. We can do this. Yes!" She actually got loud enough that Madam Pince looked up sharply.

It didn't take them long to gather up their things and get to the rooms. They were all located in the same short hall that contained the dojo. The one across from the dojo was the smallest but they didn't think it would be big enough. The next room was large and fairly clean. They consulted then went to look at the room on the same side as the dojo. It was the same size as the first room.

They decided on the second room, across the hall and down a door from the dojo. Harry remembered the rooms had all been locked and the elf had said they weren't of concern to him then he dismissed worrying about it as not important and went on with his business.

The first thing they did was push everything to one side of the room. Never mind that it did some damage, they'd repair what they needed and either banish or move the rest. But the moment they were done pushing things around several house elves arrived with soft pops.

"What is you being doing, young sir?" The elf was a bit taller than the others and obviously in charge of their little group.

"We're making ourselves a juku." Harry stopped what he was doing to look down at the being.

"A ... Blitx is not knowing what a juku is being." Blitx looked at Hermione, obviously waiting for information.

"We can't ask them to help. We're not allowed to use elves to do our work for us. That is against rules." Hermione looked frustrated. She obviously wanted their help, and was regretting the missed study time.

Harry shrugged. "We're not asking. They're offering. And besides, what would Ojiisan Agohigi do?"

Hermione bit her lip for a second then proclaimed in a tragic voice. "You could be expelled!"

"Oh, please." Harry snorted smoke out his nose. "I wish. That old man is way too wise in the ways of the world to expel me when the ministry dogs want me here. So, "He shrugged one shoulder. "He'll have to put up with me."

So, with the help of the elves, they cleaned the room until it sparkled. Then they sorted through all the furniture that had been moved around as they cleaned. They had banished things that were beyond even magical repair and sent away things they knew they didn't want now all they had to do was arrange the furniture they'd kept.

This included two big tables with chairs, a writing desk each and a couple of squashy chairs with foot stools for reading. Since two walls were chalk boards it still looked like exactly what it was, a classroom. The addition of book cases made it even more studious looking.

Hermione had insisted that they set up four desks instead of three. One for each for her, Harry, Neville and Ron. Harry was of the opinion that Ron's would gather dust but he didn't argue. Someone else might like the desk.

Hermione nodded her satisfaction with their arrangements and promptly claimed the desk nearest the bookcases. Harry took one near the windows and Neville took the other. This left the one nearest the door for Ron. Harry wondered if it was prophetic.

He settled down to do his work, sighing in relief. He hated trying to be civil to some of these people. They were sheep, fools that bleated the ministry tripe without thought. It was all he could do not to curse them. His patience was being sorely tried in his attempt to build a kazoku from such poor materials. And he felt naked, mean and temperamental without one.

They spent the rest of the afternoon in productive study. Hermione updated their project planners then returned to her private work.

Harry took Neville to the dojo to show him how the exercise machines worked.

As he worked, Harry counted reps. This left Neville free to do the workout and think. He really wanted to be friends with Harry, or Yusuke, so there were a few things he felt he needed to get off his chest. If Harry found out the wrong way, things were going to be bad.

Finally he said, "Yusuke-kun, I think I need to be straight with you."

Harry nodded and said, "Eleven, Twelve, that's done. And being straight with me is a really good idea. Lying to me will get you ... ignored at best, hurt, or killed at worse. So, talk to me."

Neville didn't dismiss this comment as most boys would, he filed it away for later. "Well, first, since I'm hoping you'll come visit me, be careful of my uncle, he's nuts. Dropped me out a window to make my magic come out, even though the healers told both him and Gran that I'm a slow bloomer but I'll be powerful when it happens. Gran does her best, I guess, but she's got a lot on her plate and she's old. I'm already taking care of the greenhouses, despite Uncle Algie's interference. He's tried to scare off any friends I might make. Hermione told him to 'take a hike' and Ron told the twins. Mrs Weasley sent him a howler, the twins sent him candy. And that reminds me, never take candy from either one of the Weasley Twins."

Harry thought about this for a second then asked, "Ok, what's in the candy? And why doesn't your uncle want you to have friends?"

Neville chuckled a bit then explained, "The twins are pranksters so who knows, you might sprout feathers, horns, or scales. Or turn colors, or ... just don't, ok? And Uncle Algie doesn't want me to have friends because they might ask uncomfortable questions about what he's doing with the Longbottom fortune. I've managed to stave off a lot of his depredations but Gran trusts him too much. He thinks I'm an idiot, but I'm not. But there's not much I can do about him until my 17th birthday, when I'll become Lord Longbottom. I really wouldn't put it past him to try to kill me before then. So, I keep my head down and watch out for ... stuff. And I'm warning you because I wouldn't put it past him to do something to you as a warning to me." Neville sighed and started another series of reps.

Harry counted by holding up a finger for each rep. "I see. Tell me about Dumbledore. And McGonagall."

Neville thought about Dumbledore for a few reps then said, "He's a good man. But he'll do bad to you in an instant if he thinks it's for his greater good. He has the best interests of the wizarding world as a whole at heart but he'll sacrifice a single person without a thought. He's a great general but a poor friend. And he's really, really busy. He ..."

Harry interrupted this with a snort. "Yes, Hogwarts, Wizengamot, ICW. And I've heard something about some sort of order of something. I've got a handle on him, I think. McGonagall, now."

Neville sat up and took the glass of water Harry offered him. "Thanks. McGonagall ... She's actually headmistress, never mind the deputy, Dumbledore delegates almost everything to her. She's as busy as he is in her own way. Headmistress, Professor and Head of House. That's a lot of titles and a lot of work. She's got some bee in her bonnet over you and I can't figure it out. I've never see her be that rude to a student before. She's a good person, smart, kind, stands up for her own. But ... I really don't get it. Be careful of her until we get it figured out."

Harry nodded. "Ok, she doesn't like me. That's obvious. And she, just like Dumbledore, has too many jobs. Shimatta! Don't you people



believe in delegation?" Harry rubbed his face. "So who can I depend on, beside you and Hermione. And can I really rely on her?"

Harry was depending on his gut instincts, as he usually did, to figure out who he could trust and who he couldn't. They hadn't failed him yet. He waited for Neville to answer.

Neville shrugged. "You can trust Ron. If his Mum doesn't get involved. You can trust Hermione unless she decides that something is for your own good. Then she's amazingly like Dumbledore and will turn on you in an instant. All because it's best for you. Or what she's convinced is best for you."

Harry thought about that one for a moment. "But you still hang around with her."

"Sure. You just have to watch her when she gets that ... look. Then she'll start nagging, demanding answers to questions that are none of her business and telling you what you ought to do. Then, she's off to McGonagall, Pomfrey or even Dumbledore. Unless you can head her off somehow." He sat up from the latest exercise, took more water and asked in a plaintive tone, "Am I done yet?"

Harry laughed softly, he really did like this soft spoken, unassuming young man. "Yes. But, I'll tell you something. I think your magic will not come out until you get physically stronger. Now, it's my turn." Harry changed the settings on the machine from the lightest to the heaviest then augmented that with a wave of his hand. "Count for me."

Neville just counted.

After a workout that made Neville groan, Harry went to the bare floor and started his Shinkendo workout. Neville just stared, again, Harry was like something out of a nightmare. He moved like a great cat, creating a ring of shining steel around himself. He bounced off the walls or ran up them. He used his magic to levitate himself then drop from above, swinging his sword while still in the air.

When he finished his shinkendo kata Harry went on to kata in iaido, taikwando and hapkido. Then he shifted to taichi to cool down. He alternated workouts so that he did sword work one day and bare hand the next. Today was swords. As he worked his way through

the last of the taichi he turned his mind to meditation, today he needed to work on his mind wards. He completely forgot about Neville.

Neville, for his part, left about midway of Harry's workout. He went in search of Ron and found him in the common room, reading History of Magic.

He flopped down on the couch, dumping Ron's feet on the floor. "Ron, we need to have a talk about Yusuke-kun."

Ron rearranged himself grumbling a bit. "Ok, ok. What's got your knickers in a twist?"

"Yusuke-kun. I know, why not call him Harry. That's because I want to be his friend and he doesn't like the name Harry. It brings up bad memories. Maybe he'll think of himself as Harry someday, but not now." He fiddled with a lace on his sleeve. "So, what was Dumbledore thinking? What does he hope to accomplish by getting you in good with Harry Potter?"

"No bloody idea. Mum either didn't know or wouldn't explain. And no one told me anything except it was for the best. I refused but, you know how they can be, no one listened. And then Mum screeched out, right there in the station that I should be sure to befriend that poor, little Harry. Merlin, I nearly fell over in shame. Bugger." He rubbed his face. "I wish they'd quit pushing me in every direction. I'm so tired of being in the shadows of everyone else. I wish I had something that was mine. You know?"

Neville nodded. "I do. Think about it? Ok?" He got up and went up the stairs to the dorm to settle on his bed with a book.

.

Harry finished his workout and cleaned up. He checked on Hermione, who was still in their juku, reading. He knew that Neville would probably go back to the common room so he didn't worry about him.

"Hermione? I need some help." He was beginning plans to help Neville, whether he knew he needed help or not. "Neville was telling

me about Longbottom Hall. He seemed very proud of it. What do you know?"

Hermione smiled over her book then put it down on her desk. "It's lovely. I've been there several times. Here ... there's a book of all the family seats ..." She rummaged in her bag for a moment. "Yes, here it is. It's even got pictures of Potter Hall and Potter Place in it. The Black family seat was destroyed by ... Cromwell, I think."

"You know about ... all that?" Harry raised an eyebrow, clamping down on a sudden urge to kill her as a threat.

"Of course I do. I did my research before I even came to Hogwarts. I was very disappointed to find out that you weren't coming. Your family connections are fascinating. Here." She plucked another book out of her bag. "This is just the public knowledge, I'm sure you can find better in your family libraries. Of course, you'll have to get permission from the Ministry to access most of it as I'm sure it's in the family libraries. Shame too."

Harry glanced at the family seat book and noticed a list with just the names of the seats and a string of numbers. "What are all the numbers?"

Hermione glanced at the page. "Those are apperation coordinates. Some aren't listed as the seats are warded and shielded, or ..." she waved a hand. "something. There's fidelis and unplottable and other things." She trailed off, watching Harry as he flipped through the book. "Is that all? I've gotten a good start on this and I'd really like to get back to it... Oh, and you have to have a license to apparate." and with that, she went back to her book.

Harry just wandered to his own desk and started reading. He had an idea and was going to have to work on it a bit to see if it would work. After a couple of hours work he was sure he could do what he had in mind, he just wasn't sure if he should. He'd have to have another talk with Neville.

.

He managed it at supper.

"Neville. When you become lord, what is the first thing you're going to do?" Harry just glanced at Neville but the hardening of the boy's face told him a lot.

"I'm going to disown my uncle. But you didn't hear me say that." Neville poked at his beef.

"Why?" Harry noticed Ron distracting Hermione and nodded at him.

"Because, he's a wanker. He's running the family into the ground with his spending and Gran refuses to see it. And Algernon isn't even a Longbottom, he's Gran's brother. He's a Flemming." Neville gave his beef another savage poke.

Hermione wasn't as distracted as Ron had hoped and butted in. "I told you, Neville, he can't be too bad or someone would have removed him by now. I told Dumbledore all about your concerns, he said he'd have a word ..."

Neville interrupted with some heat. "And I asked you not to. But, oh, no, you had to go tell on me. Uncle Algie was Dumbledore's first stop and got his feathers soothed way too easily. Algie then hexed me behind my back and threatened Gran. Nothing specific I could point to but we both knew exactly what he intended. And, since he lives at the hall, there's no way for me to ... Never mind. Just ... next time you decide to do something for my own good ... don't."

Hermione looked genuinely distressed. "I'm really sorry, Neville. I just ... well, we're friends and I just wanted to help you. How was I supposed to know that Dumbledore would go straight to Mr. Flemming and tell all. He's supposed to be the leader of the light side. That's when I started ... well, thinking about him and stuff. I'm not sure I trust him that much anymore. I just ... teachers and people like that are supposed to help, not make things worse. And you never said, until just now, exactly why you got so mad. I'm really sorry. Did he really hex you? What did your Gran say? Why didn't you say something?"

Neville looked like he was about to say something he'd regret so Harry glared Hermione into silence then explained, "He didn't say anything because it wouldn't do any good and would just have sent you on another mission of mercy. Heaven protect me from that. And his Gran probably just told him he had to be mistaken, or that her

'dear brother' didn't mean to actually hurt him with his prank. Right, Neville?"

Neville's mumble was probably agreement so Harry didn't pursue the subject. Instead he turned to Ron with a nod and a question about Quidditch, which he was actually interested in.

Ron spent the rest of the meal explaining rules and regulations, and speculating on the legality of an oar as a mount.

Hermione left early, with a thoughtful look on her face, which left the boys to their own devices.

Harry questioned Neville about his uncle. Ron interjected a few thoughts on the man and Neville finally admitted that he really wouldn't be hurt if the man dropped dead on the streets. Ron laughed a bit and said, "Or had a stroke in his sleep. The way he lives, it's a wonder he hasn't already had one. He's too fat. He can't walk up a flight of stairs without panting like a bellows."

Neville shrugged, "A fellow can only hope. Right?"

.

Harry had to admit to lying to Snape, just a bit. He didn't brew healing potions or much of anything other than poisons. Like all ninja, he brewed his own. This being said, he had a stock of poisons in mallet space. After a bit of thought he picked one.

He changed from his pajamas into dark pants, long sleeved shirt and boots. He didn't put on his shinobi shozoku as it would make him stick out in this world. He also checked to make sure his mallet space contained the equipment he'd need. He took a minute to clear out a few things he was sure he wasn't going to need in England.

Then he slipped down the stairs into the common room and folded to Longbottom Hall, he neither knew nor cared that he wasn't supposed to be able to do that.

It was one of the things about magic that he really didn't like. He hated apparation as it made him queazy, flooing was an exercise in humiliation, and port keys were worse than apparation. He'd read something about 'folding' space and time in a physics book and

decided that the math was doable. So he'd figured out how to do it and found that he just walked from one point to another without any of the ill effects of any other form of magical transportation.

He found himself in the formal parlor at the front of the house. This was just about what he'd expected, so he wasn't upset. All he had to do to complete his self assigned mission was find Algernon Flemming.

This turned out not to be as hard as he had feared. The man snored like a sumo.

Harry ghosted up the stairs and into the bedroom from which the mating call of the rhino was coming. He chuckled silently to himself. These sorts of thoughts always occurred to him at the worst times.

He opened the door and slipped inside. Looking around for the bed he noticed that this was the master suite. No one should be in it except the lord of the manor. "Presumptuous of the aho. Sooo, ..." Harry crooned softly.

He pulled a small bottle out of his pocket and wound a thread around the neck. He carefully maneuvered the thread until it touched Flemmings lower lip, then he tipped the bottle until a tiny string of droplets, like beads on a string, flowed down the thread and onto the lip.

After a moment, Flemming flicked out his tongue to lick them away. A few more moments and the man had consumed a deadly dose of the undetectable poison.

Harry left the room, clutching the bottle in his hand. He folded back to the common room, broke the thread away from the bottle and dropped it into the fire. He wiped the neck of the bottle carefully with a bit of rice paper tissue and banished that into the fire. The bottle was then tucked back into mallet space and Harry slipped up to bed to spend the next three hours reading the two books Hermione had given him.

.

The group, comprised of Ron, Neville, Harry and Dean, woke up to the sound of a loud thump and swearing in Irish. Seamus had

forgotten that Harry's trunk was warded to a fare-thee-well and tried to 'borrow' a yellow tablet.

He scrambled up from the floor, exclaiming, "Sorry! Sorry! I need a tablet. I'll pay you back when me Mam sends me some stuff from Dublin. Ok?"

Harry snorted, fished out the requested tablet and tossed it at Seamus. "Stay out of my stuff. I don't mind sharing, but you have to ask. There's stuff in there that's dangerous. I'm going to take a shower." He gathered up his things and went to shower. The other's gave him twenty minutes before they banged on the door and demanded their turns.

Harry opened the door at once, still buttoning his shirt. "I want a real bath tonight, how do I manage that?"

Ron, who had realized that Harry had no intention of obeying any rule he considered stupid said, "Ask an elf. There's all sorts of bathrooms in the castle. You want something specific, you'll have to describe it to them. Come on, Hermione will be having fits."

Harry nodded, finished buttoning his shirt and shrugged into his robes. He hated the stupid things, they wrapped around his legs in strange ways. Today, it was robes, baggy cargo pants, and a button up shirt. His boots remained the same. He cast the illusion spells that hid the bulges caused by his weapons and went down to find Hermione.

She was seated on a couch mumbling over a book, frantically taking notes. Harry took the book, closed it and piled her notes on top. He stuffed the whole thing into her book bag and said, "Come on, breakfast. And make sure you eat something beside toast and tea. You're too thin."

Hermione snorted, tossed her head and declaimed in a snooty tone. "My dear, there's no such thing as too thin or too rich." then she giggled, took her bag and led the way to the portrait hole.

They ambled down to breakfast, chatting about nothing of any importance. Neville shuddered, but, when Ron asked, he just said, "A goose walked over my grave. It's nothing."

They weren't even settled when Professor McGonagall came up to them and said, "Mr. Longbottom, please come with me. You are not, I assure you, in any trouble."

Harry stood with Neville, but the Professor told him, "Mr Potter, this does not concern you, sit back down."

Harry just said in a saccharine voice, "If he's not in any trouble then you won't mind if I come along ... for moral support. Yes?" he cocked his head to one side and smiled. The smile didn't reach his eyes.

McGonagall considered him for a moment then asked, "Mr Longbottom?"

Neville just gave a jerky nod, then stepped out to follow the professor as she led them to her office. Harry just ambled along, smoking.

"Mr Potter, must you indulge in that disgusting habit?" As there was actually no rule on the books about smoking, all Professor McGonagall could do was ask him to put it out.

"I must." Harry took another puff and sighed it out. He wasn't going to knuckle under to any one, no matter how difficult they made things. He was Miyamoto and knelt to no one.

Professor McGonagall gave a ladylike snort and announced, "See that you're done before we get to my office. I may not be able to keep you from smoking in the halls and your common room and dorm but you will not smoke in my office. And dispose of the remains properly"

Harry said, "As you wish." then made a face at her back, which made Neville snicker.

Professor McGonagall sat down behind her desk, picked up a letter then said, "Mr Longbottom, I'm afraid I have some very bad news for you." She gave Harry a pointed look. "That is why I requested privacy." Harry just looked at her. "I have the sad duty to inform you that your uncle died in the night last night. Your Gran discovered him early this morning. She wrote to ask that you be sent home. Please go pack for a stay of a week. You have my sincere condolences."



Neville just looked at her for a moment then said, "Yes, ma'am. Excuse me." He stood up then smiled faintly at Harry. "Thanks for coming with me, Yusuke-kun. I really appreciate it. Will you help me pack?"

Harry just noted the flash of irritation that went over McGonagall's face then stood and nodded. "Sure, Neville-kun, I'd be glad to."

As soon as the door closed behind them, Harry turned to Neville and asked, "Are you ok? What can I do?"

Neville smiled and replied, "I'm fine, more than actually. I'm kinda sorry he's dead, he was Gran's brother. But more, I'm just relieved. I don't have to worry about my Gran anymore. And I don't have to worry about finances, or getting hexed. It's nice." he shuddered slightly then tugged at Harry's arm. "Now ... come help me pack"

"Ok. You want me to tell the others?" Harry was perfectly willing to do whatever he could for one of 'his'.

"No need. Dumbledore did it while McGonagall was telling me. But thanks."

They ran a gauntlet of students, well-wishers who wanted to express their condolences. Harry glowered at them all, and finally started blocking the more annoying with his body. It took them twice as long as it should have to get to Gryffindor. The only person in the common room was Hermione.

"Neville, please accept my condolences." She smiled gently. "Ron's up in the dorm, packing for you."

Neville nodded to her and said, "Thank you for your kind wishes. I just hope Ron doesn't pack a bunch of stuff. I won't stay long. I just wish ..."

Harry asked, "What do you wish?"

Neville looked straight into Harry's eyes. "I wish I felt bad. I should, but I don't." He shrugged. "I just hope ... never mind." He grinned at Harry. "Excuse us, Hermione. Come on."

Harry followed him up the stair into the dorm.

They found Ron checking the clothing he'd laid out on Neville's bed. He hadn't put out much, just some underwear, a pair of jeans and a pair of boots. He looked up as their heads emerged from the staircase. "Hi. Sorry for your loss, Nev. Come see. I think I've packed what you need. All your formal and semi-formal robes are home, right?"

Neville just said, "Thanks. Yeah, all my robes are home. I'm going to have to go be fitted for Lords robes. Pain in the ass, but I'm going to be invested as soon as I can." He took a small bag, like an old-fashioned doctor's little black bag, and started putting his clothing into it. Ron helped by handing him stuff.

Harry just watched. When Neville finished packing, Harry said, "If there's anything else I can do?"

Neville's eyes twinkled as he said, "No, thank you, Yusuke-san, you've helped quite enough." Harry watched as Neville's head disappeared down the staircase.

Ron watched too. "He never liked nor trusted his uncle, so don't take it wrong that he's not ... more upset. Ok?"

Harry lit a cigarette, then said, around a cloud of smoke, "Never. I just hope he takes over, instead of letting his Gran do it. The woman trusts too easily, or she's stupid. Maybe both."

Ron shook his head. "That old dragon? No, she just put way too much trust in family."

Harry grumbled, "Well, too bad he can't demand yubitsume. I would have."

Ron gave Harry a blank look. "What's yubits ... what you said?"

"If someone offends a kumicho or oyabun or fails an important task, they cut off a finger and offer it to their boss in apology."

Ron turned a bit green. "You're joking."

Harry blew smoke out his nose. "I assure you that I am not. And be very careful, that was closer to calling me a liar than I usually tolerate."

Ron gulped, Harry looked like he wanted to do something very unpleasant. "Sorry, sorry. I didn't mean to sound ... I wouldn't."

"Well, alright then. Smoke?" Harry offered Ron a cigarette.

Ron shook his head. "No, thanks for the offer. If Mum ever found out... Let's just say, I hate howlers."

Harry grinned. "We better get going, we're going to be late if we don't run."

Ron swore, grabbed his book bag and ran out. Harry followed, his long legged gait keeping up easily.

They made it to Ancient Runes just in time.

.

shitsureishimashita – excuse me. (very formal. Not much used)

Kyooju – professor

Dono – the same as sama only very old fashioned and polite. Harry's being a snob.

Ojiisan Agohigi – grandfather long beard

kazuko – family

Shimatta – Damn

Ninkyo-dantai – charitable organization

Shinobi Shozoku – ninja uniform. Shinobi is what ninja prefer to be called but I used ninja because it's what most people expect to read.

Aho – dumb ass

And before you ask, Dumbledore doesn't notice that Harry's gone because he's not there himself.

Reminder from last chapter.

Harry grinned. "We better get going, we're going to be late if we don't run."

Ron swore, grabbed his book bag and ran out. Harry followed, his long legged gait keeping up easily.

They made it to Ancient Runes just in time.

.

Professor Bathsheba Babbling just nodded to them as they slid into seats. "How is Mr. Longbottom?"

Harry pulled his book out of his bag as Ron answered, "He's ok. He had to go home, of course."

The professor nodded and called the class to attention, then began her lecture. She explained what they were doing to cover this term, what she expected from them and so on. She also announced, "I've heard from several of the other professors that there's a slight mutiny over required writing materials. All I have to say is, I don't care what you take notes with, but I will check them and grade on completeness. Personal work is your concern; but, all assignments must be turned in on proper parchment written in proper ink. Now. Read chapter one and be ready to discuss it next class period."

Harry examined the runes they were going to cover first, then read a bit of the chapter. He wound up with a very important, to him, question. He raised his hand.

"Yes, Mr. Potter?" Professor Babbling wasn't prepared for a question this early in the year, but she was resigned. This one and the Granger girl were going to be interesting.

"I don't understand something right off. Where are the stroke order charts?"

The professor thought about that for a second then asked, "What is a stroke order chart? I've never heard of such a thing."

Harry got out his brush pen and a scrap of note paper, the professor noticed that, instead of being lined, it was covered with squares with x's from corner to corner and side to side. He quickly wrote a symbol on it. "This is kanji. It has two applications. One, simple writing; two, magical applications from warding to ... well, just about anything. Only, kanji used in magic have to be written in proper stroke order or they're useless. Informational kanji can be written in almost any order but ... you're better off to follow the proper order, so that they'll all be the same size. See?" He showed her the kanji he'd written.

"I do see. Interesting. But, to answer your question; no, there are no proper stroke orders for runes. You can write them in any stroke order. It's the charging of the rune that makes them magical. Uncharged, they're just writing."

Harry bowed slightly from a sitting position. "Thank you, Sensei."

Professor Babbling glanced at the page of notes Harry had already written and said, "Perhaps it would be a good idea to take your notes in English?"

Harry frowned, another interference in his affairs? He decided to nip that one in the bud. "Perhaps. Unfortunately, I don't write English, only kanji. I'm sure that I wrote on a ... what would it be? Third grade level? ... before I went to Nihon but I've forgotten it through disuse."

The professor looked taken aback. "Oh, I see. Well then, do what you need to do. But I'll have to grade off for your notes being unreadable ... er, to me."

Harry just shook his head. "That is unacceptable. My notes are perfectly legible to me and that is all that counts, if you want proof, I'll read them to you. Excuse me, I'm falling behind the others." And with that he firmly stuck his nose back in his book and began reading.

Professor Babbling, not willing to get caught up in a battle of wills with him, returned to her desk to think about this mess. This boy so obviously did not want to be here, he didn't care much about the rules and he had eyes as cold as ice. She did not want to be around when he finally blew. Professor Babbling had been teaching long enough to know when a student was on a slow fuse, and Harry Potter was definitely one.

Harry completed his chapter by the end of the hour and headed off to Arithmancy. With Hermione on his tail.

"Yusuke-kun, was that true? You really don't remember how to write English? Do you think you can fake the professor out like that? Do you want me to teach you?" Hermione was having trouble keeping up with Harry. "Slow down."

"No. We have exactly fifteen minutes to get from one side of Hogwarts to the other. And ... Yes, it's true. I really don't remember. I am not faking the professor and no. Be careful. You're getting very close to being too pushy." Harry knew he was edgy, he always was after a Hitogoroshi. But some things needed to be done, so he did them. That included offing anyone who was messing around with one of his special people.

Hermione sighed, yanked her bag strap back onto her shoulder and grumbled, "Well, shoot. Ok. Dumbledore made the announcement at breakfast. Did you talk to Neville? Was he ok? Is there anything I can do?"

Surprisingly, Ron came to the rescue. "Damn it, woman, give him a break. Neville wasn't very upset, he and his uncle don't get along. There's nothing any of us can do. He'll be gone two days. One for the funeral and one for his investiture."

Hermione blinked, "His what?" she scurried to keep up with both boys longer legs.

Harry looked blank too. "I don't know that word." He snarled wordlessly as the door he tried turned out to be a fake.

Ron directed them down a hall that Harry didn't remember from his tour of the school. "This is only here on Wednesday. There's another one down the way that's only there on Thursday but it leads to the Potions class."

Ron stopped at the classroom door, which was closed. He tried it and snarled, "Locked. Blast. Ok. Investiture means, literally, a ceremony ..."

Hermione couldn't help herself if she tried, she interrupted, "From the Latin (preposition in and verb vestire, 'dress' from vestis 'robe') to invest is the formal ceremony of conferring the authority and symbols of a high office upon an individual. In other words, someone is going to give Neville the physical symbols of his Lordship. Probably his Gran."

Harry nodded, "I see. So. I'll have to find him a suitable present."

Ron grimaced. "Probably should. I would, but ... well, I'm just broke enough that I can't afford something suitable."

Harry snorted. "Give him some chocolate frogs. It's really the thought that counts. I can't count the number of times that someone gave me something totally inappropriate, expensive and really unappreciated. I always really liked the things that showed the giver thought about what I'd like, rather than what would impress either me or my father. Hermione?"

Hermione thought about that for a moment then agreed, "You're right. We all should get him a little something. Just to show that we're thinking of him."

Ron nodded. "Ok. I can manage a little something. Hermione? Would you wrap it for me? I ... well, I'm really not good at that sort of thing."

Hermione nodded quickly. "Sure, just bring it to me. We better get inside, Professor Vector is looking at us."

Harry bowed carefully to the professor before sitting down in a seat near the door. He usually wanted to be away from doors and windows but he wanted to be as far away from Hermione right now, as humanly possible. Her bossy ways and interminable questioning was getting on his nerves. He didn't want to say anything to her that was – not proper. It would hurt her and would not help his quest to get her more socially aware.

He grumbled as he got out his things. "I swear, this place is like a rabbit warren. And the stairs move? What the fuck is that? And doors that aren't and halls that are only there on Tuesday?" He eyed his notes with disfavor and stuffed the spiral notebook back into his



bag in favor of a blank one. If this teacher said one word about his kanji, he was walking out.

Instead of any sort of comment, Professor Vector started lecturing on the uses of arithmancy in spell creation. Harry was really interested in this so he paid close attention, taking notes carefully.

At the end of the hour, Professor Vector announced that anyone who could afford one was welcome to use a slide rule to help them with the advanced calculations needed in the class.

Harry again raised his hand to ask an unusual question. "Professor, is it alright for me to use a soroban?"

Professor Vector smiled faintly. She didn't care what the others said, he was polite. "I don't know what that is. Do you have it with you?" Harry nodded. "Show me?"

Harry was already fishing it out of his bag. He put it down on the desk in front of him.

"Oh, an abacus. Yes, that's fine." She picked up the fine instrument. It was a rectangular frame made of some dark reddish wood, rosewood perhaps, with wires of steel. The beads were jade, the color of Harry's eyes. "Very nice."

Harry put the abacus back into its case and stowed it away. "Thank you, Professor. Perhaps I'll send to my father for a slide rule too."

Professor Vector just nodded. She dismissed the class, saying, "That's all for today. Have the problems in the back of the chapter done for next session. Good day."

Harry gathered up his things and shoved the whole mess into his bag, willy-nilly. He was hungry and wanted a good meal before Transfiguration. He was sure McGonagall was going to be a pain again. He really didn't understand why the woman didn't like him. He'd expected more trouble with Snape, from what the others said. He resolved to write a letter to his father and have all his contacts investigated. He snarled at himself for his stupidity. He should have done that first thing.

He managed to get all the way down to the Great Hall without a hanger on. In other words, he avoided both Ron and Hermione. He joined Seamus and Dean just long enough to get to the Great Hall then broke off to sit by himself. He needed a break from all the closeness. He just wasn't used to being so close to so many people for so long with no way out. He ate quickly and made a break for the door, only to be thwarted by Professor McGonagall.

"Mr Potter!" Harry turned his head to find the professor standing next to the only way out. "I would like to speak to you for a moment."

Harry ambled over to her. "Then speak." He took a cigarette out of his case and lit it.

"Will you please refrain from that disgusting occupation while in my presence? And ..." she took a deep breath. "Well, I won't stand here blethering and hawering. We've gotten off on the wrong foot with each other. I was hoping to have you to tea on Saturday to try to ...fix this."

Harry nodded. "I don't know what the problem is. I'm sure I didn't do anything, but I'm willing if you are. So ..." He glanced at the air over McGonagall's head. "I better run. I'll be late to ... well, doesn't make much difference since it's your class."

Professor McGonagall let out a little squeak. "Blast. We both better hustle."

And hustle they did, making it to the classroom with five minutes to spare.

McGonagall called the class to order and set them to reading the chapter of the day. Then, when she was sure everyone had read it, she started asking questions. Hermione, of course, waved her hand frantically. McGonagall just said, "Miss Granger, I see your hand. Please allow others an opportunity." Hermione subsided with a soft huff.

Harry was pleased to see that his suggestion to Flitwick had been passed on. He'd run into the professor in the hall and overheard him grumbling to himself about Hermione's habit of butting in during review sessions and hogging the floor. He'd suggested

acknowledging her hand then telling her outright that they'd seen her and reminding her that others wanted a chance too.

He really couldn't see the benefit to annoying the professors as she did. But then, he'd quit attending school of any kind after his experience at his first, and only, juku. Private tutors had kept him up to speed with all his studies, magical and otherwise. He swore once again that he was going to socialize her, or kill her. He just wasn't sure which yet.

He was also considering killing Ron Weasley. The boy didn't have a brain in his head. His constant antagonizing of any Slytherin that happened to be nearby was more than annoying. It was downright dangerous. Someone named Theo Nott had hexed Ron and he'd had to go to the hospital to have horns removed. Harry smiled to himself, he had looked quite funny with rams horns curling around his ears.

Professor McGonagall asked questions all around the room then startled the whole class by asking Harry, "Mr Potter, could you give us a short run down on the differences between transfiguration practices in Britain and Japan?"

Yusuke, who was still having trouble thinking of himself as Harry, stood up. "Yes, Sensei. First, living to non-living, or animate to inanimate as you call it, is considered ... rude. It's just not done, unless it is a great emergency. I believe it comes from either Buddhist or Shinto principles. Do no harm. Who knows whether the transfiguration hurts the animal? Who knows if it is frightened? It is interfering with the creature's natural state, therefore, it is probably harmful on some level." He paused for questions but there weren't any. "Very well. Everyone understand?" A few nods but most students looked a bit glassy eyed.

Professor McGonagall nodded her head in encouragement so Harry went on. "Other than that and the fact that we don't use a wand, things are pretty much the same. Oh, all efforts to transfigure anything into gold have failed. Also, silver or platinum don't work. You can transfigure the semblance but not the essence."

"I see. Well, any questions? Any one? Miss Granger, surely you have at least one question?" She looked around the room finally

catching Draco Malfoy's eye. "Mr Malfoy, surely you have a question?"

Malfoy stood up, looked around with a very satisfied expression on his face then asked, "So, Potter, what on earth possessed you to run off to Japan of all uncivilized places?"

Harry just smiled. Draco paled, that smile was quite familiar, in a way. Harry had smiled just like his father, Lucius Malfoy, did before he ripped a strip off him. "Ah, A very good question. Thank you for asking." He took a moment to look around then said, "I left because I was not happy where I was. My relatives were not nice people and were abusive. You do not need the details, it's not your business. In Japan, I am well treated. My friends would give their lives for me, as I would for them. They call me oojisama, kumicho..." He smirked a bit. "Also, Shiko-sha and Shinigami-chan. Not freak, and boy. I do not wish to be here again. Satisfied?" Harry pinned a now milk white Malfoy with a glower that made his thin blood run cold.

"Yes, I believe I am." Malfoy decided he really had to write his father a letter. He flopped down in his chair in a graceless way that would have earned him a lecture from his mother.

Harry looked around. "Any more personal questions?" His expression clearly said there'd better not be. He did notice the rather shocked look on Hermione's face.

Professor McGonagall gave up. "Mr Malfoy, a detention and ten points from Slytherin for asking personal questions in an educational venue. Our time is nearly up, end of chapter questions for next period. Class dismissed." She watched the students leave feeling rather old and very tired.

"McGonagall-sensei? Are you well?" Yusuke was a bit worried about the professor. She looked tired and a bit ill.

"Yes. Just ... feeling guilty. I told Albus the Dursleys was not a place to leave a magical child. So unsuitable. But ... he refused to listen. When we found out what they'd been doing, I really thought he was going to harm them. Then he gave Petunia a lecture the likes of which I have never heard. Vernon is still in prison." She took a deep breath then exclaimed, "Goodness me, what am I thinking. Mr Potter, I'm ... embarrassed." She fluttered a bit then settled.

Harry just sighed. "Sou ka. Hai. I think you did the best you could. Ojiisan Agohigi has some answering to do. But not just yet. Excuse me, I think I should go now." He stood up and left, giving the entering student a warning glower.

.

Yusuke spent the rest of the afternoon studying, writing letters and thinking.

He had history first thing, then defense. He had single potions after lunch. He decided to read the history first so he settled down with his nose in The History Of The Magical World. He had been amazed that only one book was needed for all seven years, until he opened it. It was a magical book, the index showed that it covered all seven years in detail. He settled down to read the chapter that Professor Binns should be covering tomorrow.

It didn't take him long to finish his chapter. He was tired of reading so, instead of moving on to defense, he wrote a letter to his father and another to Genji. Then he wrote to the man he'd left in charge of his house, and his kaikei and shingiin. He instructed them to find out everything they could about Dumbledore, Voldemort and Malfoy. He also placed secondary importance on Granger, Weasley and McGonagall.

He was also going to do some asking around of his own. He wondered at the faint air of tension that seemed always to surround Ron and Hermione.

He tapped his fingers on the table while he thought. Dumbledore was a very busy man. He was aware that he, Dumbledore, tended to make suggestions then dismiss things from his memory. A case in point was the fact that Dumbledore had had McGonagall send out the letters for years. If they didn't succeed, or got a refusal, she usually didn't follow up on them. Harry just wondered if he'd be here at all, if the Ministry hadn't stuck its nose in. Two years of refusals, the last one four years ago, had ended the Admission letters. He felt sorry for the owls.

He finished his self assigned tasks and went to supper.

.

At supper, Harry watched the interactions between Neville, Hermione and Ron. He had moved Dean and Seamus off his radar as not being 'players'. He was also removing most of the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs from his list. Slytherin was a 'keep a loose eye on all of them', for now. So, his first order of business was to figure out what was going on between his special ones.

So he asked Neville.

Neville had settled beside him and taken a bowl of ramen.

"Neville, I'm glad you made it back for supper. So, tell me a story." Harry smiled at Neville.

"Ok, what about? As if I didn't know." Neville was by no means as stupid as many thought. And now, as head of his family and an acknowledged lord in his own right, he was letting more people see the real him.

"Well, first, how was your investiture?" Harry really was interested in this.

"Fine. Gran tried to talk me out of it, but I just put my foot down and said no. Uncle managed to eat and drink himself into a massive stroke, at the family expense, I might add. And she's no head for business, no matter what she might believe. Being a societal mavin is not the same as being a good manager. So ... business will all come to me now. And keeping up with everything is not going to be fun. And this is not what you really want to know about, is it?"

Harry shook his head in mock sorrow. "My friend, you wound me. I really am interested. I have a present for you. I was going to owl order something, but I changed my mind. I'll give it to you later. Now. Tell me about Ron and Hermione? Did they date? Was it a bad break up?"

Neville choked on his soup. "Date? Hermione and Ron? Absolutely not. It was a real mess."

And with that Neville proceeded to tell Harry about the Philosophers Stone.

It seemed that Dumbledore had convinced his friend Nicholas Flammel to bring his stone to Hogwarts, just before Gringotts was broken into.

Hermione, in her unquenchable quest to know everything about everything, found out that something was on the third floor, not that Dumbledore had kept it much of a secret. "Stay away from the left hand corridor on the third floor unless you wish to die." was not a good way to keep a school full of magical and inquisitive children away from that particular place.

Ron had said something nasty about her in her hearing and sent Hermione into the girls room to cry. The only reason the troll that Quirrel, the possessed teacher, let into the school hadn't killed her was the Weasley twins, Fred and George, had noticed that she was missing and gone to find her. They'd blinded the troll with smoke bombs, grabbed her and run. The professors had handled the troll, but in all the confusion, Quirrel had gotten the stone and taken it away.

Dumbledore had had to admit that Voldemort had a body again. Rita Skeeter had seen to that. Neville's acid comments about her made Harry laugh.

But that whole event had put a definite wedge between Ron and Hermione that still existed. She was scrupulously polite, even mildly friendly, to Ron. And Ron was, quite obviously, clueless as to why she never offered help on homework, or research, nor would she ever be alone with him if she could avoid it. The Twins had pranked him for ages and he still didn't get it.

So, Harry changed the subject, his curiosity satisfied about one question.

"And who the hell is Voldemort, when he's at home." Harry knew he had something to do with the reason the Ministry wanted him here. 'They' had told him that Dumbledore would fill him in, obviously Dumbledore hadn't gotten the memo. He wanted to know things now, not get a nasty surprise because he was uninformed. Dumbledore had a lot to answer for and the list was getting longer by the day. "I've overheard a few bits of information, but nothing truly useful. The Ministry representative told me that Dumbledore would explain

things to me, but ..." He shrugged, spreading his hands then clenching them into fists. "he's keeping all his information clenched in a tight fist. Blast the old baka."

Neville shook his head. "I'm not the one to ask about him. Please don't press me. OK?"

Harry saw his obvious distress so he asked, "Daijoubu desu ka, Neville-kun?"

"lie, Yusuke-kun. Please, ask someone else." Neville tried to hide his distress, and to anyone else he succeeded, but Harry could see that he really didn't want to talk about it.

"Very well, Neville-kun. Gomen nasai." He patted Neville on the shoulder and pushed a cup of tea nearer to his hand. "I'll ask Hermione. Something I was devoutly avoiding. She'll lecture me to death."

Neville smiled a bit. "Yes, but she's sure to have all the facts, or be able to find them. She's a regular demon for research. And you can tell her I said so." He heaved a heavy sigh. "Be careful, my friend, the waters are deep and full of sharks."

Harry nodded at this and returned to his meal.

When he was sure Hermione was done eating, Harry called to her, "Hermione, a moment, if you please."

Hermione, who was just about to head for their study, turned and said, "Sure. What is it?"

Harry looked around at all the staring people and sighed, this was annoying, everyone staring at him all the time. "Some place a bit more private? Our study, perhaps?"

Hermione was also uncomfortable. "Yeah, I think so too."

They walked up to the study in companionable silence, both well aware that eavesdroppers were everywhere.

When they got to the study, Harry pulled several ofuda from his sleeve and tossed them to the ceiling and walls. He put a special



silencing and locking one on the door. He activated them with a simple, "Kaishi."

"Now, we can talk in peace. Hermione, who the hell is Voldemort and why does the Ministry insist that I have to return to England. It's not as if I'm someone special. Oh, and do you want me to kill Weasley for you?" Harry settled in one of the easy chairs while he was speaking and called another close with a wave of his hand.

Hermione settled into the chair with a soft huff of irritation. "You are seriously sitting there and telling me that no one has explained anything to you?"

Harry just raised an eyebrow then pulled out his cigarette case. "You want?" He motioned at Hermione with the case.

She wrinkled her nose and shook her head. "No, thank you. Now. I'll start at the beginning and forgive me if I tell you something you already know."

"Je ne shini desu. Um ... don't worry about it." Harry waved the hand holding the cigarette leaving a thin trail of smoke behind.

Hermione sighed then started telling Harry everything she knew again, careful questioning from Harry patching together the things she'd told him before into a whole.

When she was done, Harry sat and stared at her for so long that she ventured cautiously, "Yusuke-san, daijoubu desu ka?"

Harry sighed. "No, I'm not ok. These people are all ... I have no words. If it wasn't so pathetic, I'd be pissed. They really think I'm the only one who can defeat this ... Dark Lord. Because of a prophecy by a drunk? Are they all crazy? Or just stupid."

Hermione curbed her endless flow of questions to answer as succinctly as possible. "Yes, Yes, and I'm not sure."

"Sheeple, that's what they are. They all want to bury their heads under the covers and have someone else deal. Well. Ok. But ... it's going to cost them. I have to think. Mmmm." He returned to his smoking, allowing Hermione to sit, watching him with some concern.

He returned to the present after two cigarettes, or about fifteen minutes. "Ah, Ofukuro-sensei and Ojiisan Agohigi have some explaining to do. Do you think they'll tell me anything?"

Hermione snorted softly. "I doubt it. Ojiisan Agohigi is Dumbledore, right?" Harry nodded. "He believes in second chances, and thirds and fourths. No matter that it's creating chaos all over. Take Ron for instance. I was told rather pointedly to be polite to him, by both Dumbledore and McGonagall. You'll notice that I took your advice to heart. They're both ... professors but ... I respect McGonagall but I don't trust her. She's Dumbledore's woman to the core. And Headmaster Dumbledore isn't here enough to merit the title. He's always either at the Wizengamot or the ICW. He makes pronouncements, meddles where he doesn't understand all the ..." She waved a hand in irritation. "then wonders why things are falling apart. Voldemort ... all he has to do is hit a few key places and we're doomed. But no one wants to see that. I'm seriously considering grabbing my folks and heading for ... somewhere not here. But ... if something isn't done soon, Voldemort will spread his poison all over the world. Then where will we be?" She bit her lip hard to keep from crying.

Harry sighed. "Shimatta! I'm no good with crying females. Yamero yo, Hermione-chan."

Hermione managed to sniffle her tears away. "Sorry. Um ... warui."

Harry laughed, "Yokatta. Good. Now, I know a thing or two. Stop worrying about it." He cocked his head. "Ha, someone is coming. I think it's Neville." He waved his hand, said, "Yamero." and the ofuda burned away.

Hermione yelped, "Oh, shit. Sorry. I forgot one thing. Some of Voldemort's minions, I'm not sure who, tortured Neville's parents until they lost their minds. He's a bit sensitive about it."

"Well, that explains a few other things. Find out who it was, please."

There wasn't time for more conversation as Neville came in carrying an armful of books.

Harry stood up. "Neville. I have your investiture present here." He grinned. "I looked it up. You're entitled to carry a weapon on your

person at all times. So ... here." He reached into mallet space and pulled out a very nice tanto. "It's very sharp, short enough that you can stick it in a boot and it's legal." He held it out to Neville across the palms of both hands, as was traditional. "Dozo."

Neville, not quite aware of what to do, simply took it from the middle with one hand. Then he bowed and said, "Thank you very much." He pulled the tanto out of its saya a bit. "It's very beautiful."

"I'm glad you like it, Neville-san. I'll show you how to hide it, if you like." Harry really wanted Neville to carry the tanto. Things were more dangerous than he'd expected, if what Hermione had said was true.

Neville gazed at the tanto for a moment then said, "Gran and Uncle didn't want me to have sword lessons, because they both thought I was too clumsy. But I got in a few. The teacher taught me some spells to hide bulges." He tucked the tanto into his belt then cast the spell he knew. The bulge disappeared. "Ok?"

Harry inspected him then nodded. "Yes, very good. Hermione? Comment?"

Both boys expected Hermione to go off on some sort of rant about carrying weapons in school.

But, she wasn't stupid by any means and was beginning to realize that Harry and Neville were her last chances at real friends. She decided that she would keep her thoughts to herself and just be there to help out when things went wrong. So, instead of blowing up, she just said, "I hope you know the rules. I don't see it at any rate." She smiled at Neville. "And, that brings us to ..." she reached into her bag and held out a package that was obviously a book. "It's the Rules of Order of the Wizengamot. It also details the rights and obligations of a Lord of the Realm. I thought it might come in handy. Especially since your Gran seems to be determined to keep you ignorant."

Neville grinned. "Well, it seems you're jumping in with both feet. Thanks. This will really come in handy."

Hermione flushed but defended, "Well, in for a penny in for a pound. Some of the things Yusuke-sama said the other day got me to

thinking. I think ..." She laughed. "I think I need to rethink a lot of my attitudes. He's right, they're not working." with that rather cryptic remark she turned to her desk. "Now, I really need to get on my homework. I've got an outside research project that I want to get to."

Harry glanced at Neville then remarked wryly, "Well, we have our marching orders, don't we?"

Neville just shrugged. "I'm behind because of my absence. I have three days to make up the work in potions and ten for the rest. I hate Snape. He's just ... Snape."

Harry laughed, agreed and went to his desk to finish his work.

Later that evening, Neville still had his nose in a book, Hermione was writing in a spiral note book and Harry was smoking while he read a newspaper. He had managed to get a mailbox delivered, the elves had put it on his desk while he was in class.

He could now send letters within England, to previously established locations, which included Gringotts and a small shop that imported newspapers from around the world. This meant that he got Tokyo Times and Hokkaido Shimbun.

Hermione stretched, glanced at her watch and exclaimed, "Oh, goodness me. Look at the time. We'll be late if we don't hurry."

Harry snickered as he put his last cigarette out then banished it. He used to just banish them but quit when he realized he had no idea where they went. "We're only about twenty steps away from the portrait hole. Remember?"

Hermione, very intelligently, stuck her tongue out at him.

Harry snorted then said, "I wouldn't want that nasty thing in my mouth either. Come on."

They didn't even have to hurry. The portrait closed just as curfew rang.

.

Next morning was a repeat of the others. Exercise, meditate, shower, dress.

Hermione had her nose in a book at breakfast and only ate because Neville forced a sandwich of toast, eggs and bacon on her.

Harry ate traditional and had to endure Ron telling him miso, rice and smoked fish was 'barbaric'. Harry couldn't see that consuming vast amounts of eggs, bacon, ham and other heavy foods could possibly be good for someone. And Ron's table manners were worse than any he'd ever seen. Even the coarsest yakuza had better.

Harry watched Ron stuff himself for a moment then remarked with commendable mildness, "If eating a proper British breakfast gives one manners like yours, pray excuse me." If Ron had looked him in the eye he'd probably have choked on something. Harry returned to his food, ignoring the snickers from nearby students. Hermione smirked into her book.

When he was finished, Harry got Hermione's attention by taking her book away from her.

"Yusuke! Baka! Give me that." Hermione made a grab for it.

"In a moment. I'm heading for class now. You have exactly ten minutes to sit there, it takes ten to get to class. Leave on time, please." He then gave Hermione back her book.

She grumbled, stuck her book in her bag and tapped Neville on the shoulder. "Are we following our fearless leader or messing around here for another ten minutes?"

"Let's go now. Weasley is giving me the queazies." Neville silently cheered the fact that the twins had failed last year and were repeating, only because he and Arthur, their father, had agreed to finance their dream of a prank shop, if they got E's in their classes. He'd actually managed to sneak that promise by both his Gran and Uncle.

Harry led the way to History, interested to hear the lecture. He wondered how a ghost could actually teach a class.

It turned out that a ghost didn't. Binns didn't take attendance, make announcements or check to see if anyone remembered anything from last year. He just started lecturing. His drone soon put everyone in the class to sleep, except for Harry.

He listened for a few moments then realized that Binns was lecturing on Goblin wars, a subject that they were supposed to have covered in third year. Finally he leaned over, poked Hermione, who was nearly asleep and asked, "When does he get to this years material?"

"He doesn't. We'll have to study the proper information ourselves. He has a set of lectures he gives every year."

Harry felt his stomach drop. "Chikushou! Nan da kor'ya? Every year? How does he get away with that?"

Hermione shrugged. "I have no idea. And Dumbledore just twinkles and says that there's nothing like learning history from someone who was there. Only ... he wasn't. I checked. The best I can figure out, he died in the early 1880's, just old age. He rose right out of his dead body and went to class. That means, unless he was really old he couldn't have been born much before 1730 or so. That's allowing for him to be around 150. I hate this class."

Harry smirked a bit and announced, "Color me shocked. The supreme student Granger-sama hates a class." Hermione smacked at him feebly. "Come on, let's just skip. You'll do the reading tonight."

Hermione snorted. "I've already done it."

Harry smirked even worse. "Me too. Let's take a walk. It's nice outside and the last of the nice days, so I've been told. We'll go over the defense work and I'll sneak you a ride on my oar. How about it?"

Hermione bit her lip. She'd never skipped a class in her life but she just couldn't see any reason not to. She knew kids who admitted to skipping every class then cramming for the finals and getting O's. "Well, ok." She shoved her things into her bag and followed Harry out of the room. Binns didn't even notice.

Harry glanced over his shoulder and decided to do something nasty to that ghost very soon. There was no excuse in keeping him on. He

didn't teach and students were surely suffering, even if they didn't know it. He didn't care that they were bored, he did care that they weren't learning anything.

"Hermione-chan, who was it who said that those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it?"

Hermione shrugged. "I don't remember, but they were right. And Goblin Wars are all well and good but ... the entire wizarding world needs to know more modern history or we're all in trouble." She nearly tripped as the staircase began to move. "Blast!"

Harry grabbed her arm and snarled. "Something will be done about ... never mind. Are you alright?"

Hermione straightened her robes. "Yes. I'm fine."

They walked around the lake and Hermione even managed to coax the giant squid up close.

Harry was impressed, most girls would be squealing like stuck pigs at the sight.

The squid waved a couple of tentacles around for a bit then submerged again.

Hermione then asked to see Harry's oar.

He reached up and pulled it out of mallet space and let it hover about two feet off the ground.

Hermione sat on it at Harry's gesture, sidesaddle. "No, straddle it or you'll fall off at the first sharp turn."

Hermione protested, "But you rode sidesaddle when we came up from the train." her rueful expression puzzled Harry until she continued, "And I'm sorry we didn't hold a carriage for you but we thought you were going across in one of the boats. For the experience."

"And why would I risk myself in a boat suited to four first years?" Harry looked down his nose at Hermione in mock hauteur. "Now, get

situated and I'll get on behind you. We'll take a turn around the towers and land on the upper walk. That'll put us close to Defense."

But, once in the air, Hermione wasn't having any of it. She realized that she really didn't like heights and she was slightly afraid as there didn't seem any way to stay on the oar. It was very broom like. She admitted to Harry that she didn't like brooms either. Another thing Ron held against her.

Acceding to Hermione's pleas, Harry landed them on the upper walk and they strolled along it and into the upper floors of the clock tower.

"Yusuke-kun, what's in that ... what did you call it? Mallet space? And where the heck ..." Hermione trailed off as Harry started laughing.

"Ranma1/2, mallet space. I read the manga and wanted one. Chichi-ue insisted that I do the research and figure it out myself. I had a lot of help but I did do it myself. And learned a lot about physics in the process." Harry smiled at Hermione's rather stunned expression.

"Ok. Well, what is in it?" Hermione looked around as if she expected to be able to see where it was.

A laugh greeted this. "I'm not sure. I cleaned it out a little while ago but it does tend to gather junk. Here." With that, he started pulling things out and putting them on the floor.

When he was done there were four books, a spiral note book, a pen, two tanto, a wakazashi, a ninjato, a katana, the oar, two bento boxes; one empty, one full and a small pile of trash.

Harry looked at the collection for a moment then said, "I need more bento and some candy. And some fruit. What's in season here?"

Hermione just sighed. "You shouldn't eat too many sweets. They'll rot your teeth. Apples and oranges are in season. And nuts."

Harry called for service, thanked the elf for coming and asked for his empty bento to be cleaned and filled and for the elf to bring him whatever fruit, nuts and sweets were available.



The elf popped away and returned quickly with the clean bento, a three layer tiffin carrier and fruit, nuts and sweets in small boxes. Harry tucked it all away, thanked the elf and glanced at his watch.

"We better go or we're going to have to run so as not to be late."

Hermione huffed her irritation. "You ... I swear, I used to be ten to fifteen minutes early for every class. Now I'm nearly always almost late. You're a bad influence."

Harry bowed, still walking. "I do try, Granger-dono."

Hermione just growled, "Don't think that calling me lady in that old fashioned way will get you anywhere." which caused him to give her his best wide eyed innocent look.

They were both laughing when they got to the room.

They weren't laughing ten minutes later.

Lockhart had let a cage full of cornish pixies loose in the class room. His dramatic flourish when he removed the cover had agitated them then he'd opened the door. Harry was going to kill him, sooner or later, after he'd figured out how to do it without getting caught. Or he'd just hang around and wait for someone else to do it for him.

As it was, he was doing his best to corral the damn things. Hermione wasn't being much help, not that she wasn't trying, but they kept getting into her hair and pulling it. This made her squeal then try to dislodge it, which made the pixie angry. And that made it necessary for Harry or Neville to take time to remove the pixie.

Finally, Harry just snarled, "Kono Faku!" and pulled his katana out of mallet space. He unsheathed it and handed the saya to Hermione. "Here, take this and get out."

Hermione just took it and scurried out, keeping low. Neville went with her, keeping the pixies from attacking them both with stinging hexes. Lockhart was locked in his quarters by this time.

Neville started to close the door but Hermione stopped him. "We might have to go back in and help him."

Neville snorted, a strange, harsh sound coming from him. "I don't think so. It'll all be over very soon. Like ... now."

And it was. It hadn't taken Harry long to cut the pixies down in mid air. He didn't bother with any fancy technique, he just jumped into the air and started cutting them. As they were small, he mostly cut their heads off or cut them in half. He even took the time to cast a charm to keep blood and guts off his clothing, face and hair.

It took him almost a minute to get the last one. As he had picked off the pixies, one by one, they had started scattering and hiding, instead of attacking. Harry didn't care, he was bound to get them all. One thing Lockhart hadn't told anyone was, their bites were poisonous. You wouldn't die, but you'd get a nasty infection.

"Well, that's that." Harry took time to flick the last of the mess off his blade then wipe it down with a piece of oiled rice paper from his sword cleaning kit. The one he kept in his pocket. He banished the paper, took the saya from Hermione and grumbled, "Well, that's another waste of a good class. Can we have lunch yet?"

Hermione sighed. "No, it's not time yet."

She started to say something else but was interrupted by Lockhart who scurried out of the classroom and announced, "There! See, I knew you had it in you. Harry, Harry, Harry; I can call you Harry? Of course, I can. Our brilliance is a guaranteed headline. We just need to get some pictures. Where's that Colin boy?" He tried to put an arm around Harry.

Harry thrust him off easily and said, "Yamate! Hottoyte!"

Hermione realized that Harry was very close to doing violence to the idiot. She moved into Harry's line of vision and started to touch him, but Neville stopped her. She thought quickly then called, "Choto matte. Maa Maa, Yusuke-kun. Calm down. Come on. Leave him alone and let's see if they've served lunch yet."

Harry tugged his robes back into order and gave Lockhart a dirty look. "You hentai. You keep your hands to yourself."

Lockhart spluttered a bit, then tried to make some idiotic excuse. No one listened to him. They all turned their backs on him and hurried off, Hermione and Neville practically dragging Harry.

Harry sighed as they pulled him along. "I miss my men. And I hate it here." He refused to say anything more until he'd had tea.

.

Lunch was followed by an announcement from Dumbledore himself that killing class specimens was not allowed. Harry gave the man his best innocent 'who me?' look and received a twinkling, forgiving benign smile back. He suppressed a shudder. The man was truly totally clueless.

Hermione just sighed. She's always depended on authority figures to help her form her own opinions. After all, they were older, supposedly wiser and in power for a reason. Right? Evidently not.

Harry realized that he'd drifted off a bit when Ron poked him in the side, something that was going to get him hurt, sooner or later. "Yes?"

"Pass the chicken, will you?" Ron didn't have an opinion in his head, other than that all the food should be within his reach.

Harry passed it then said to the table at large, "When do we have Ethics class? Or Logic and Reasoning? Seventh year?"

Hermione snickered. "Ethics? Never. Logic and Reasoning? Are you serious? Wizards don't understand Logic or Reasoning. I found that out the hard way. If you're really interested we could have a discussion period once a week."

"That would be good. I'll order some books as well. Have you read Arts of War, or The Prince. They're both interesting and we could apply the principles of Reasoning to both. And there's a series of Ethics books from ... I've forgotten. But my Sohonbucho will remember. I'll write to him tonight."

Neville waited politely until he was sure they were done speaking then asked, "Would it be alright for me to participate? It sounds interesting."

Harry glanced at Hermione then said, "I'd be interested in your view point. Just, no shouting or name calling. It's counter productive." He remembered a few discussions in the Wakashu common room that had come to blows. Not something he'd enjoyed sorting out.

Neville nodded. "We ought to establish some ground rules for such things. Just so there's no hard feelings. I'd hate to lose a friend over a discussion."

Ron just bumbled into the conversation by asking, "What the heck are you talking about? Classes in Logic, Reasoning or Ethics? Who'd want to take those? Just more essays and stupid stuff to remember for a test we'll forget as soon as we take it." He reached across Harry to grab a bowl. Unfortunately, it was Harry's personal rice bowl.

Now, due to his early life, Harry had an extreme dislike of anyone messing with his food. He usually had a bad reaction. In this case he grabbed Ron's wrist and slammed it down on the table. "Leave it! That's my rice!" He got into Ron's face, deciding it was time that they saw a taste of his temper. "Next time you lay a hand on my food, I'll cut it off. Do. You. Understand. Me?"

Ron took one good look at Harry's face and gasped. He was right on the edge of murder. "Sorry! I'm sorry. I thought it was ..."

Harry interrupted softly. "No, you didn't think. You just grabbed. You're nothing but a stomach on legs. Mend your ways or I'll mend them for you." He then smiled, patted Ron on one pale cheek and said, calmly, "Now that we have an understanding ... potatoes?" and he handed Ron the bowl of mashed potatoes that was just out of his reach on the other side of the rice bowl.

Ron gulped. He took the bowl with a shaking hand then put it down. "I think I've lost my appetite. Excuse me." He got up, found his book bag and hurried out.

Hermione started to fuss at Harry for his actions but Neville frowned at her, then shook his head. She thought for a second then said, with commendable restraint, "Yusuke-kun, that wasn't very nice. He just made a mistake. Why did you do that?"

"Because I'm a bit of a junk yard dog when it comes to my food. I went hungry often enough that I tend to guard it." He caught the look on Neville's face so he explained, "The Dursleys didn't think a freak should have nice things, like enough food. Chichi-ue saw to it that I had potions to make up for the lack. Drop it."

Hermione just sighed, "I think I hate those people. And ... never mind. Just ... if I do something ... stupid. Don't look at me like that." She grinned at both boys. "I'd probably pee myself." Then she went off into a snicker fit.

Harry eyed her with every evidence of disgust, then laughed too. "So ... don't grab my food. Touch me from behind without warning. Or take things out of my hand without asking and we'll be fine."

Neville just marked Harry's advice, then said, "We better get going. Potions. The bane of my existence."

A snide voice from behind them made Neville and Hermione start. "Well, Longbottom, if you had half a brain you wouldn't make such retarded mistakes. You're hopeless. And, if you think you're going to manage a Masters in Herbology without Potions, think again."

Harry just examined the slender, very blond boy for a moment. He stood up and walked into his face. "Nan dai yo, aho? Odore! Oy, kono yaru ..."

Hermione interrupted, "Yusuke-san! English!"

Harry snorted. "Ya, warui. You! What the fuck is this, you bastard? Why are you picking on my friend? You want to start something? You better be careful or your mouth will write a check your ass can't cash."

Draco Malfoy backed away a bit. Harry's low voiced comments were not only rude, but rather frightening. He reminded Draco of his godfather, Severus Snape, when he was in a temper.

"My name is Draco Malfoy. I believe we covered that?" Harry made a rude sound and waved a hand, producing a cigarette from somewhere. "Do you actually know who I am? I'll have you to know that I am a very important person. My father is Lucius Malfoy, a member in good standing of the Wizengamot and he's on the board

of governors. I'll thank you to remember that. And to mind your own business." He stuck his nose in the air, sure that he'd cowed the other boy.

Harry dragged in a lungful of smoke then exhaled, right into Draco's face. "Ah! That explains much. You are so obviously your father's darling. I'm so sorry. My mistake." Draco preened. "I thought you might be someone of consequence in your own right. Excuse me." And with that he bowed just enough to be extremely rude then he walked off, motioning for Hermione and Neville to follow.

They did, along with several others.

Draco let out a yelp then yelled, "You don't walk away from me! Who the hell do you think you are? I'll tell my father and he'll ..." no one of any consequence heard the rest of the rant as they were all leaving for classes. Several Slytherins stayed around to sooth Draco's ruffled feathers. His godfather eyed him with disgust and resolved to write to Lucius as soon as possible. The boy was becoming a liability in more ways than one.

He realized that it was just as much his fault as it was Lucius and Narcissa's. They'd all spoiled the boy rotten and gotten exactly what they'd deserved. He watched Harry Potter as he led his little group of sycophants out the door. The boy wasn't as arrogant as he'd expected, nor did he look that much like James. To be truthful, he looked more like Lily than he did James. Snape sighed and headed for his classroom. He didn't hurry as class couldn't start until he got there.

Class was dismal. Harry was still in a temper and refused to participate. If asked a question he just shrugged and said, "I don't know, ask Granger-san." Hermione took pleasure in jumping on those questions and answering with her usual thoroughness. Draco pouted and gave answers at random. Everyone else in the class either didn't know, or couldn't frame their answer into coherent sentences.

Snape was extremely surprised and annoyed to find that Neville Longbottom was one of the few who could actually answer any questions about the subject of the chapter, which turned out to be the uses of aconite in potions and the origin of its many names.

He finally gave it all up as a bad job and snarled, "You'll all take a T for the day, except for Longbottom, Francis and Taylor."

Harry just interjected, "Ah, Snape-Kyōshi, you forgot Granger-san."

Professor Snape was not about to get into an argument over that girl, so he just nodded then continued, "Since none of you seem to be able to read, you'll all give me twenty-four inches on the use of aconite in potions, due this period next week." He glowered around for a moment, then snarled, "Well, what are you dunderheads waiting for? Out! All of you, out!"

The entire class scrambled to get out, except for Harry. He levered himself up from his chair, stuffed his things into his bag and wandered in the general direction of the door.

Snape stopped him with a silky voiced, "A moment, Potter, if you would." Harry just glanced over his shoulder. "If Dumbledore finds out you have a sword, he'll confiscate it. Now, I don't care what you do with it, but he'll object if you decapitate a student."

Harry sighed dramatically, "I suppose defenestration is out as well?" Snape just nodded, one sharp tip of his head. "Too bad."

As soon as he hit the door, Harry plucked a cigarette out of his case and started smoking.

Neville give up, his curiosity was killing him. "May I?" he reached for the cigarette.

Harry gave it up easily, Neville had asked, and waited. "Of course. Be my guest."

Neville took the cigarette a bit awkwardly then just walked along looking at it. "Um ... what now?"

Harry chuckled while Hermione looked on in a combination of irritation and amusement.

Harry produced another and put it to his lips. He sucked in, hollowing his cheeks a bit. Neville followed suit and promptly began coughing. Hermione helpfully slapped him on the back several times, until he stopped choking.

"Merlin's saggy arse cheeks! How can you do that? That's ... awful."

Hermione took the cigarette from him with a snicker. "A badly misspent youth, I suspect."

Harry just chuckled, then rejoined, "Without a doubt."

Hermione found that she really couldn't resist the temptation to try the cigarette herself. She knew it was bad for her, she knew it was nasty, but she just had to know how it tasted. She took a deep drag. She immediately started coughing. Harry patted her back.

"Oh, bloody fucking hell! That's ... that's ..." She took the handkerchief Harry helpfully handed her.

"That is a Djarum Coklat kretek. It's a bit strong for a newbie." Harry took back his carefully scorgified handkerchief and tucked it away. "But I started smoking at about nine, so I'm an old hand. Now. What do we have for tomorrow?"

Hermione cleared her throat, it still felt a bit scorched. "Well, Herbology, then Defense ... what a joke that is. Lunch and arithmancy then runes. And don't think I've forgotten about those cigarettes either."

Harry rubbed his face, ignoring the cigarette problem for something more important. "Lockhart is a menace, granted. But ... as long as I pass, I really don't care."

Hermione nodded. "It's Defense as usual. So we'll have to self-study this as well. Unfortunately, Lockhart takes attendance so we can't just skip. We'll have to sit in class and waste a whole hour of our day." She held the cigarette away from her face, wondering what she was supposed to do with it.

Harry snorted softly and said, "Yes, we could be ... studying. Or having an orgy. Or something else interesting."

"An orgy? What would you know about that?" Neville looked interested, Hermione looked outraged. Ron eavesdropped like mad.



Harry said, "Not much. My Kazoku doesn't deal in ... allow that sort of thing." Neville caught the slip but didn't say anything about it.

They were heading for their study when Harry had his first, and only, run in with Peeves.

Harry was just crushing out his cigarette when Peeves tumbled into view. "Oh, what is Potty Potter doing? Nasty boy. Smoking in the hall. Shame on you." And with that, Peeves tossed several water balloons at them. One hit Hermione in the head and another hit the cigarette she was still holding. Harry looked up just in time to get one in the face. Neville ducked but got one in the shoulder and another in the back.

Harry grabbed Hermione and shoved her into Neville's arms. He stepped between them and the poltergeist. He recognized Peeves for exactly what he was and did what he would usually do. He snatched several ofuda from his sleeve and threw them at Peeves, shouting, "Totsugeki shimasu!" as he did so.

The flurry of slender slips of paper glowed just before they hit Peeves in the face and chest. He made a small 'eep'ing sound before just disappearing with a soft pop.

Harry's swearing echoed through the hall and down the staircases. Hermione finally told him to, "Urusai, Yusuke-baka!" Then clamped a hand over her mouth.

Harry just glowered at her, demanding, "Well, what the fuck was that. Some sort of spirit, I know ... sure, but why would anyone allow a spirit that attacks people to remain? That's stupid in the extreme."

Neville just shrugged. "He's always been around and a real pain in the ass. I'm really not sure why."

Ron goggled from behind them. He'd been just about to warn them about Peeves but had been just that much too late. He couldn't believe that Harry had done, with just a few bits of paper, what students and professors had been trying to accomplish for years, maybe decades. He hurried to catch up.

"Wow, that was ..." he flailed one hand, trying to express himself. "fantastic. How'd you do that? Was it wandless? What's Professor Dumbledore going to think? Was it dark magic?"

Harry just walked away.

Hermione, on the other hand, snarled, "Will you shut up! That wasn't dark. Banishing a malignant spirit is never dark. And Peeves was definitely malignant. Idiot!" then she turned and flounced off

Ron blinked for a second then yelled after her. "Hey! You have to be polite to me. Dumbledore said." Hermione turned, walking backward, and crossed her eyes at him then she turned back and hurried after Harry.

They studied until supper then returned to the common room after. Harry went up to the dorm and called for service. The elf that popped in was pleased to inform him that there was a bathing chamber with a huge tub available behind the shower room. He took one look and told the elf that he was more than pleased. He was especially delighted when the elf offered to scrub his back for him.

He spent nearly half an hour in the tub, just soaking. An elf finally told him he had to get out, before he 'shriveled up like a potion fig' as the elf said. So he got out and put on the yukata he'd brought with him and ambled out into the dorm room.

Neville and Ron were arguing amiably about something while Dean threw Bertie Botts Beans at Seamus.

Harry thought for a moment, another thing that he really missed was playing Hana Fuda with his men. There was no hope of sneaking some of them in and he didn't want to sneak out just to play cards; so, the only alternative was to teach his dorm mates. He decided on a game much like Baccarat or 21.

"Oi, you guys want to play some cards?" Harry offered the pack to Neville.

Neville took them, exclaiming, "Oh, Hana Fuda. I've wanted to learn since I first saw them. Yes."

.

Ending the chapter here as it's getting way too long.

.

The class schedule is a bit weird but, in case you want to know.

Yusuke's schedule

Mon. charms double, trans, lunch, free

Tues. potions double, lunch, free

wed. runes, arith. lunch. trans

Thurs. history, defense, lunch, potions

Fri. Herbology, defense, lunch, arith and runes.

Hitogoroshi – hit/murder

oojisama – prince

shiko-sha – the enforcer

shinigami-chan – little god of death.

Kaishi – begin

kono fakku – fuck this

yamatte – stop it

hottoyte – piss off

totsugeki shimasu – charge (attack)

The problem with bowing in Japan, and especially in my version, if you don't do it right, it can be quite insulting. That includes bowing too low, which is sarcasm, or not bowing deeply enough, which is insulting. Even bowing just the right depth at the wrong time can be called into question.

Harry spent the rest of the evening teaching his dorm mates how to play the card game.

It was late and they were all tired, the room was hot so Harry slipped up a bit. "Oi, Seamus, open the damn window. I'm about to sweat to death." Harry shucked his yukata off one shoulder, wrapping the sleeve under his arm, he tucked it into his obi.

His head snapped up when he heard Seamus exclaim, "A Thiarna Dia!"

Neville stared silently while Ron and Dean both whispered, "Cool!" with every evidence of awe.

Harry shrugged away their compliments, as was proper, only saying, "Arigato, mina. Neville, deal, will you?"

Neville dealt the cards. "Ok, but I gotta ask. How the hell did you get permission to have all that ..." He gestured at the tattoos. "done? When did you start and ... and ..."

Harry chuckled as he gathered his cards. "How could Chichi-ue forbid me when he has the same. I really think he let me get started because he thought I'd give up the second I felt the first poke. I started when I was ten and they were completed ... about six months ago. They're spelled to move and grow with me. Anything else?"

Harry wanted to play one more round of cards, but everyone else wanted to look at his tattoos. He stripped off his yukata and stood up in nothing but a fundoshi. "Ok, ok. One good look, then keep your eyes to yourselves." He held his arms out to the sides so that everyone could see the dragon writhing across his back, tail on one buttock. It started with the head on his right shoulder and pectoral, head pointed at his waist with the neck going over his shoulder, one seven clawed paw clutching the curve of his shoulder. It swooped across his back just under his shoulder blades and around his waist then ended with the tail on his left buttock. The one clawed paw that could be seen gripped then loosened. The dragon writhed amongst a thick bed of peonies which budded, bloomed and died, revealing then concealing a swarm of koi which swam around fluttering their fins realistically.

Harry waited a few minutes while they looked then said, "I'll be really unhappy if anyone gossips about this. It's not something that is shared without permission." He was pleased to hear them all promise not to tell anyone.

.

Harry looked at his watch. "It's Friday." Hermione rolled her eyes in an 'I know that'. "Yes. Herbology first. So where's the classroom."

Neville sounded so happy when he said, "The greenhouses." that Harry didn't have the heart to reply, "Yes, of course."

He just said, "And those are ... where?"

Neville led the way out a side entrance and down to the greenhouses. Harry was very skeptical about the whole thing.

He knew a bit about potion ingredients, especially the expensive ones. He was, after all, in charge of their 'import' business. But he wasn't all that keen on herbs and simples. He was more interested in the animal ingredients, particularly the renewable ones. So this was going to be ... different.

They all enjoyed the walk down to the greenhouses. The day was bright and clear, the air clean and crisp. The greenhouses smelled of earth and damp.

Harry was sure he wasn't going to like this class much. He had done all the gardening at his aunt and uncle's home from as young as he could remember. When he'd told his Chichi-ue this, he was only given gardening tasks as a punishment.

Neville took a deep breath then announced, "This house is too damp, the professor needs to adjust the vents. I think the wind direction is playing havoc with them."

Hermione noticed Harry's surprised look and snarked a bit. "The Longbottom Greenhouses, inc. didn't become the best in Britain and second best in the world because of luck. Neville has been taking care of them since he was little."

Neville nodded. "Yes, Uncle Algie didn't like doing it so he dumped it all off on me as soon as he could. And a good thing to. The man had a black thumb if I ever saw one. Come on, let's go in. I want to get a good bench."

Hermione nodded. "Yes, this bench is nice." She plopped her new book bag down on it and started asking for her materials. They popped to the top of the bag while she machine-gunned questions at Harry. "But Yusuke-kun, I thought that you would know all about Herbology. You said that your family was an importer. Why don't you know more about growing herbs? Why don't you sit down? Why do you insist on smoking when you know it's not good for you? Why ..."

Harry settled on Neville's other side, grinding his teeth to keep from snapping the girl's head off. Finally he said, "Granger-san, you are a babbling fountain of why. But you never wait for answers. Please be quiet."

Hermione snapped her mouth shut for a moment before saying, "I'm sorry. But everything is just so exciting. I ... I need to know things. I don't know why, I just do."

Harry nodded. "I understand. It's just that you ask some of the most personal questions then never wait to hear if I'm even willing to answer or not. So ... Ah." he turned to look at the door. "Madam Sprout is here."

Neville breathed a sigh of relief, the conflict between Harry and Hermione was rapidly coming to a boil, mostly due to Hermione's relentless questioning. Her need to know everything possible about anything that interested her or caught her attention in any way was annoying. He was just not sure that annoying someone like Harry was a good idea. He had a suspicion that Harry's personal filters were a bit ... different.

Harry was doing his best not to lose his temper with Hermione, he actually did like the girl. It was just; she was relentless, he'd rather be interrogated by okami, at least they could be put off by demanding a lawyer. He realized that he was going to have to establish some criteria outside which questions were not allowed. Otherwise, he was going to murder her.

Madam Sprout lectured on the plants they were going to study this term. She was particularly pleased to be able to present a Japanese bonsai tree. Harry eyed the thing for a moment then smiled to himself. One of the few things he did that was garden related, that he enjoyed, was bonsai. This tree was actually one of his rejects.

It was a particularly large spruce tree that he'd begun four years ago. He'd thought, in his arrogance, that bigger was better. In this case it was not. The tree was a bit unstructured, as it had not taken to shaping very well. It was a bit too symmetrical for true bonsai. He'd intended it be windswept but it just appeared deformed.

He nearly laughed out loud when he discovered that she'd acquired sprouts of Japanese Juniper so they could each have one. Harry wondered if she realized that a proper bonsai took years of constant attention. He did all his own wiring and shaping but left the daily misting and such to Gaius.

His quiet snicker caught her attention. "Do you find something funny, Mr Potter? If you do, would you inform the class?"

"Yes, Sensei. It's just that ... bonsai take care every day. They need misting, wire adjustments, fertilization ... many things. Most of the students don't have the time ... or inclination, for caring for such a time intensive project." Harry bowed slightly and sat back down.

Madam Sprout nodded. "Well, very good, Mr Potter. No, most students don't have time for the daily maintenance of a bonsai. House elves will do that for us. All we have to do is keep track of the weekly progress of our trees, and do the initial shaping, pruning and give instructions, in writing for adjustments and such. We'll also be studying tropical potions plants such as..." and she rambled off on a repeat list of plants that they were going to study. She finished by assigning a whole book and two essays. One due at the end of the week, and the other due at the end of the term. She said, since they were sixth years and responsible people, they could do with less hands on training and more in depth research.

Hermione looked very pleased at this, as did Neville. Several other students looked happy, but others groaned. What she meant was, there will be a lot of research and essays, not much greenhouse work. An easy class had just become rather hard. Neville was already planning his term paper. Hermione had known about this

before hand and had already written up her proposal. Harry just noted that he needed a research project and left it at that.

Everyone was a bit surprised when Professor Sprout announced that the period was nearly over. "Now, everyone needs to turn in their essay and their proposal next hour. You're all excused."

Neville stopped a moment to have a word with the professor about the vents while Hermione and Harry started back to the castle.

This led to the first real confrontation between Draco Malfoy and his two thugs and Miyamoto Yusuke.

Malfoy stopped Yusuke by the simple expedient of putting a hand on his chest. "Hang on a sec. I wrote to my father and he gave me permission to ... befriend you."

Yusuke eyed the hand then said, with dangerous softness, "I believe you are touching me. Is that polite in England? Forgive me my ignorance, as I was raised in Japan." His raised eyebrow and pointed look had Draco removing his hand quickly.

Draco eyed his two minions and jerked his head significantly. They took this to mean they needed to convince Potter that Draco was to be obeyed without question.

Harry, firmly in Miyamoto-kumicho persona, just waited to see what would happen next. One, he wasn't sure what his name was, reached out to grab him by the arm. Yusuke moved just enough that the grab missed. Then he struck, moving with cobra like speed, he caught the grasping hand and bent it back against the boys arm, cramping his wrist over so hard that the pain made him fall to his knees. He knelt at Yusuke's feet, holding his wrist and moaning while Draco gaped, mouth open.

"Now, see here!" Draco jerked his head again and the other thug moved in.

Yusuke just slapped him across the face. "Do not! I don't have the fucking patience for this." the thug glanced over his shoulder at Draco, who called him off with a grimace. Yusuke turned to Draco and snarled, "Little boy, tell your father that you have made a mistake. I do not wish to know you." He gave all three a cold look. "I



have no patience with people who lack subtlety. I do not like having to get physical with your sort. Now, excuse me. I have someplace else to be." He bowed slightly, a lord to a commoner, and walked off, lighting a cigarette as he went. As he smoked, he forced himself to calm down. He was used to dealing with other kumicho, other Japanese people, and he disliked this Western lack of manners. They had no subtlety, no manners and no tact.

Hermione had seen the whole thing and hung back, sensibly staying out of the way. It didn't hurt that Neville had grabbed her from the back and put a hand over her mouth, the only sure way to keep her quiet.

Harry tucked his Kumicho self away and remarked, "I really hate having to get physical with that sort. They're just children playing adult games. They're going to get really hurt."

Hermione huffed irritably. "And I suppose you're better at it?"

Her scorn didn't faze Harry at all. "Of course I am, Hermione-chan. I trained at my father's knee. And, unlike some fucking blond bimbo we both know, I listened and learned. There's a time for threats and a time for caution. This is a time for caution and learning. Come, we better hurry or we'll be late to DA."

Neville snorted. "Oh, we wouldn't want that. Professor Lockhart would be so disappointed."

They hurried up the path, laughing as they went. No one noticed the glare aimed at their backs.

.

Draco snarled at Crabbe, "Well, that went well. A slap on the cheek and you're all done? Fine support you are. And you ..." He turned to Goyle. "You're just about as useless. Did the big bad hero hurt your little wrist? Merlin! I swear." with that, he turned and stormed away. Leaving Crabbe to heal Goyle's sprained wrist the best he knew how.

This made them late to class, arriving just behind Harry and his friends. Lockhart gave them all a pass, this time.

After chuckling in an obnoxious manner he chided, "Of course, you must remember that a truly famous person is always on time. Unless he's not. Now. How many of you have read all my books?" A few hands went up, including Hermione's. "Excellent! Excellent! I thought I'd just re-enact a few scenes from one or two of the works I have been privileged to produce. Perhaps, starting with my latest, Ambling with Onnas."

Harry blinked once then glanced at Hermione. He mouthed 'Onnas?' Hermione had to shrug.

Meanwhile, Lockhart was continuing his 'lecture'. "Ah, yes, I remember it well. The evil onnas were taking over this village. I was, of course, able to ..." He sighed at Hermione's wildly waving hand. "Yes, Miss Granger?"

Hermione surprised Harry by asking, "Professor Lockhart, what does walking around with women have to do with ... well, anything?"

Lockhart put on his worldly amused face and smirked at the class. "Onna's, my dear, are Japanese demons. Very deadly, very dangerous." He glanced around the class room to see who was impressed. Most of the girls were cooing and giggling, most of the boys just looked disgusted.

Harry shrugged irritably, this man was really beginning to get on his nerves and it was only the second class. A week hadn't passed yet and he was longing for home. He was wasting an entire year, maybe two, of his education on this foolishness.

He broke into Lockhart's rambling with a coolly declared, "Onna are women. Oni are demons. And I doubt that you really met either." He carefully picked up his books and papers. He was not about to slam anything, it was not proper behavior and his father would be disappointed in him. "Excuse me. I'll be leaving now."

"Mr. Potter." Lockhart tried to call him back. "Mr Potter! Return to your desk at once." Lockhart preened a bit, he would gain a lot of 'face' when Harry Potter obeyed him.

He was to be disappointed, Harry just kept going, calling over his shoulder, "I really prefer the name Miyamoto-san." He lit a cigarette

as he walked. Harry wasn't sure exactly what he was going to do but he was going to do something. This man was a waste of space.

Unfortunately, he ran into Dumbledore. Dumbledore took one look at him and said, "Ah, Harry, not in class? Well, come to my office and we'll talk about it. Come along now." His benign twinkly expression made Harry vaguely ill.

They walked together in silence, mainly because Harry pointedly ignored any comment Dumbledore made.

When they got to the guardian gargoyle, Dumbledore said, "Tim-Tam." and led the way up to his office.

He got settled in an uncomfortably soft chair and accepted an offer of tea, but refused the lemon drop. He had no idea what that was, but wasn't in the mood for any sort of candy. He waved one hand over the tea, which glowed gold for a moment.

Dumbledore cleared his throat then began, "Mr Potter, Harry, if I may?" Harry just glanced at him over his cup. "Well, then, Harry. I know that you are very angry with all of us. I don't really blame you. Having your inheritance ... er ... threatened by the Ministry can't be pleasant. I do apologize for that. I tried to block it, but I couldn't get enough votes on my side in the Wizengamot. I actually missed that vote as I was in a general meeting of the ICW at the time. So ... um." He coughed slightly. He wasn't getting the reaction he expected and was off balance. "I notice that you cast a spell over your tea. I assure you that it is not contaminated in anyway. And I notice that the spell was ... how did you do that, dear boy?"

Harry just shrugged. He wasn't going to give this old man any slack at all. He was supposed to be one of the most powerful wizards of the age, let him figure it out himself. "Ah, Dumbledore-dono. You appear to be a very wise man. I should think a man of your experience would surely need no explanation for how my magic works. It's very simple. As to being dragged here against my will. I am not happy. There are several things that I find offensive, but I am a simple person with simple needs. As long as these are met, I see no need for unpleasantness."

Dumbledore beamed at Harry, this was going better than he'd expected. "I see. Well, I'm sure we can meet your needs. If you

need something just tell your Head of House. I noticed that you've already made a few friends. This is good. I do believe that Ron Weasley would be a good friend." He twinkled over his cup.

Harry just sipped his tea. "Yes, perhaps. Those who are worthy will be friends, those who are not, will not. I have my own criteria by which I measure friendship. If these are met, we will be friends, if not, we will not. And ... I will not tolerate some things. I hope we understand each other."

"Ah, yes, I do hope we do." He gazed at Harry for a moment. "Now there's another thing we need to discuss. I understand that you were taking lessons in ... weapons. And something called martial arts? We don't have such classes here and ... carrying swords and such is ... er ... discouraged."

Harry smirked a bit, produced a cigarette, already lit, and said, "You don't mind if I indulge? Thank you." And, without waiting for permission, proceeded to smoke. "Yes, I practice ninjado, iaido, shinkendo, hapkido, and taikwando. I don't need a teacher at present as I am refining my practice. I have a dojo, kindly provided by your staff. And a juku. I carry a ceremonial weapon or two, my father would be very disappointed in me if I left them behind. But I do not carry a sword upon my person." He refrained from explaining that he carried them in mallet space. "I trust that you would not be instrumental in disappointing my father in any way?"

Dumbledore walked right into that one. "Oh, no, dear boy. Far be it from me to cause any friction between you and your ... er ... father. Please behave in a manner that would make him proud of you." There, Dumbledore thought, that was a proper response. He wasn't getting between the boy and a man he considered his father. What could possibly be wrong with that?

Harry took another puff of his cigarette, making Dumbledore wince. "I thank you. My father has taught me proper manners. They are Japanese and not what the English might like, but they are my way now. I will strive to keep incidences of friction between me and other students to a minimum. As long as they do the same. Yes?" He exhaled the last of the smoke and took another puff. "If they do not..." he let that trail off on a cloud of smoke.

Dumbledore sighed, but returned, "Well, I do think reporting things to your head of house or another staff member is better, but I do understand the ... heat of the moment. Now, on to other matters ... more tea?" Harry refused with a slight bow, not nearly as deep as should be accorded the headmaster. "Well, I was wondering why you changed your timetable?"

"As was I. I selected my classes most carefully." Harry waited for Dumbledore's excuse. He was sure there was one. Not that it would be very good.

"I thought to give you a bit of time to ... become used to your new environment." A carefully bland expression accompanied this.

"Meh! My education is very important to me. Your curriculum is ... simplistic. No offense intended. But ... the Japanese people value education very highly and expect their children to be hard working and to accommodate themselves to the needs of their kazoku. I am considered a very good student and a proper kumicho in my kazoku. I am not used to having this amount of ... free time. I prefer to be busy." Harry finished his cigarette and started on another, banishing the butt with a wave of his hand.

"I see. I am truly sorry that you feel ... put upon. If you can keep up with any of your ... outside school work via owl post. Please feel free. But ... perhaps you might consider this a slight ... vacation from your responsibilities?" Dumbledore was very carefully feeling his way. He didn't want to insult the boy, or make him angry. He was going to have enough trouble when the poor young man realized that he was the 'hope of the wizarding world'. He just hoped the pressure wasn't too much for him.

Harry glanced at the old man and was sure that he wasn't telling everything. He would write to his father again. He needed to know what these people really expected from him. Not that he was going to give it, but, how was he to avoid giving the wrong promises if he didn't have all the facts?

"Perhaps." he allowed. "But then, perhaps I don't feel I need a vacation? Perhaps I enjoy my responsibilities?" Harry sifted through several remarks he could make and decided on, "I realize that there is more to this than meets the eye. I just hope that ..." He shrugged elegantly. "Secrets are all well and good. I just hope that the wrong

secret kept doesn't sneak up to bite one, or both, of us in the behind. Excuse me. Lunch is beginning and I'll admit that I am hungry. Your cooks are excellent, and I do appreciate their efforts to afford me with proper food. And the bath is very nice too." he got up, bowed and left. Leaving Dumbledore very satisfied with their conversation.

Harry too was satisfied, although for different reasons. He now had a feeling for Dumbledore. He was satisfied that the man was well meaning. But that didn't relieve him of the onus of his actions. Harry felt a bit annoyed, in a way. If he had been malicious, that would allow Harry to move against him. As he was not malicious, in fact, he meant the best; he'd have to be worked around. It was all a bit annoying.

Harry finished his cigarette and wondered vaguely if Dumbledore could be kept distracted with the ICW and the Wizengamot and kept out of his, Harry's, business that way. Letters were going to fly between Japan and England for a while.

.

Lunch was accompanied by a lecture from Hermione on respecting teachers and authority figures in general. Harry mostly ignored it, while Neville did his best to get her to shut up. It didn't work.

Ron gained friendship points by rather politely pointing out that no one was listening to her and that, if she didn't eat, she'd go to class hungry. "And you really don't want that, do you? I mean, runes and arithmancy? Really. And why you all decided to take such hard classes instead of the easy O's of Care Of Magical Creatures and Divination, I'll never understand." And with that, he returned to a massive helping of shepherd's pie.

Harry eyed him for a moment, received a gormless look in return, and sighed. "Well, Ron, if you don't understand now, you never will. Why don't you just forget about it and move on?" He knew he sounded snarky, but really, the boy didn't have a clue. And beyond that annoyance, the barbarism he was surrounded with got on his already fraying nerves.

Ron knew he'd been insulted, somehow, but he couldn't figure out exactly how so he just grunted and finished his last bit of pie. "Fine

then. I'm headed for class. I'll be in the common room when it lets out, if you want to play some chess or cards."

He left and the others followed shortly thereafter, Hermione giving herself an upset stomach by gobbling almost as fast as Ron in order to eat then get to class on time.

Another round of Runes and Arithmancy went just as the first, with one exception. As they were sixth year, they were expected to complete a project combining both runes and arithmancy which would be turned in to both professors. Harry put his head together with both Neville and Hermione and they agreed that Hermione was to come up with the project, which would include an element of herbology and ofuda. Harry was leaning toward wards but he'd wait until he could consult with the others. They would probably yield to him, his force of personality practically guaranteed that, but he wanted their input.

They retreated to the juku and settled at one of the big tables to discuss their project. After a bit of lively debate during which Neville finally demanded, "How the hell can herbology and warding be combined? That just doesn't make sense."

Harry produced an ofuda and showed it to both Hermione and Neville. "Here. If you don't use proper papers, an ofuda won't work as well. Ofuda are used for almost everything in Japan. I was thinking that we could produce a paper, made from herbs, that supports warding better. Something that won't eventually dissolve. Rice paper will degrade due to weather and such until the wards go down. Stone, wood and metal are much better but take a lot of preparation. Paper wards, wards that can be written and put up in seconds are so useful. Especially if they aren't ruined by rain, snow or other weather. See?"

Hermione reverently took the slip of paper from Harry. "Oh, my! A real ofuda? What does this one do?"

Harry took it back. "It's a grenade. I activate it and it goes off. I can time them easily. Want to see?"

Neville yelped, "No! Yusuke-kun!"

Harry smirked. "Oh, did I forget to say? I can also control the power of the explosion. But, if you don't want to do it here. We could take it outside."

Hermione was eyeing the ofuda. "Naruto is real?"

Harry snorted. "No, but Baku is."

Hermione shook her head and corrected, "Are."

"No, is." Harry shot back. "Baku is the kanji for explode, or close enough. The bigger you write it, the more powerful it is, unless you can really charge it. Which I can."

Hermione just apologized, "Oh, sorry. My Japanese is crap. Just enough to read manga, with a dictionary."

Harry just grunted, "Hn! Ok. If you get stuck, maybe I can help you read it. Which one are you reading now?"

Hermione just grumbled, "Not now. This is school work time. Ok?" she really felt a bit embarrassed to be reading manga not realizing that even adults in Japan did so.

Harry readily dropped the subject, sensing her embarrassment, besides, it was school work now.

They discussed the fundamental theory that Harry wanted to apply and decided it could be done. Neville was sure that a combination of rice paper, papyrus and oil would work well. He just wasn't sure which oil. That would be the basis of their work, finding out which of several oils would do what they wanted. Hermione also pointed out that she and Neville would have to research which runes would do the same thing as Harry's kanji.

After making their decision, Harry announced that, if he didn't get some fresh air, he was going to commit seppuku. Hermione winced but Neville chuckled a bit then said, "I wouldn't, if I were you. I'm not going to second you. Why don't you go grab Weasley? He loves to fly."

Harry nodded. He had agreed, with himself, to give everyone here two chances. Ron was working on his second. So was Hermione,



but Harry found himself liking the bookish, bossy girl. Neville was a good, solid friend; a bit stodgy, but Harry liked him.

.

As he was heading to the common room to see if Ron wanted to go fly the stairs below Harry moved. He heard a loud yelp and someone yelled, "Be careful, the sequence has changed again." He decided that something was going to be done about those stairs, as soon as he could figure out what that something needed to be.

"Oi, Ron, want to go fly with me? I'm about to go stir crazy." Harry waited a moment while Ron got up.

"Sure. Let me get a cloak. It's going to be cold in the air." Ron was glad for the chance. He wasn't exactly sure why Harry didn't like him, except for overhearing his Mum, he didn't see any reason for it. So, never mind Dumbledore or his Mum, he was going to try to be Harry's friend.

They clattered down the stairs, jumping over the beginning of a move. Ron swore, but Harry just ignored it.

They made it out the door and into the front courtyard without further incident. Harry pulled his oar out of mallet space and started to mount it.

Ron stopped him, explaining, "We're not allowed to fly into or out of the courtyards. Some of the younger or less experienced flyers have hurt themselves. We have to walk down to the Quidditch pitch. Come on, it's just beyond the greenhouses."

"Ok, some kids really need a permanent keeper. I know some gaki like that. They'll do anything stupid that someone else dares them to." Harry shoved his oar back into mallet space, not seeing any need to carry it.

Ron goggled for a moment, then said, "Where'd it go? How'd you do that?"

Harry's amused expression set Ron's teeth a bit on edge, but he relaxed when Harry replied easily, "I call it mallet space. I learned it and some other great stuff from Ranma 1/2. Very interesting reading,

if you read it the right way. It was a real bitch to figure out how to actually do it. I still haven't figured out Miroku's Kazaana ... um ... wind tunnel. That would be great, but I'm not sure where the other end of the tunnel would wind up. It could be very dangerous to people. And I'd really hate having to restrain it with holy beads all the time." He grinned at Ron. "So ... maybe it's not that good an idea after all."

By that time they were at the pitch and Ron straddled his broom. Harry produced his oar again and they took off. Ron, noticing Harry's straddle stance, called, "Hey! I saw you fly up from the train. I thought you rode sidesaddle, like a girl."

Harry gazed at him for a second then called back, "Only when I'm wearing good clothing and not in a hurry. Straddling ruins the crease in my trousers. See if you can keep up." He mumbled, 'Ride like a girl? I'll show you.'

With that, he took off across the pitch, flying at a speed that made Ron whimper. Then Ron recovered himself and chased after him.

.

While Harry was flying with Ron, his Chichi-ue, his father, was gathering intelligence on every name Harry had sent him. The reports were taking him a bit longer than he liked.

He liked the rest of what he was learning even less. His recommendations were simple, straightforward and a bit violent. Miyamoto-oyabun also wrote letters to Yusuke about his management of the Potter fortune. His advice to his son was to let his people deal with the whole mess, just as they had done for the last few years.

He also included information on Neville Longbottom who had spent two weeks in Tokyo about three years ago. He was the source of some important potions ingredients, or rather, his family was. Their contact had been murdered not long ago, the murder made to look like suicide.

Malfoy was a player, minor, but rich.

He had no information about either the Grangers or the Weasleys, but he had people in England looking into it.

He also knew very little about the gumi called Death Eaters. His recommendation was to avoid contact until more information could be gathered. Miyamoto-oyabun had the feeling that the final call on them would be to cancel their contract, with life.

Miyamoto-oyabun was not pleased. He hated having his son so far away and he also hated not being able to get him the information he wanted. He sent another letter to the ICW. This one a bit more forceful.

.

Harry and Ron returned to the common room, pink cheeked and laughing. Ron declared, as they stepped through the doorway, "You are mental. I never thought I'd say this, but there's no way I could keep up with you."

"I am perfectly sane and I have papers to prove it." Harry put his nose in the air, looking astonishingly like Malfoy, until he burst into laughter. "Now, I'm starved and it's..." he glanced at a tempus. "two hours until dinner."

Ron flopped down on a couch in an inelegant sprawl. "I'm hungry too. Flying always leaves me ready to eat a cow."

Hermione looked up from her book to say, "You won't starve in two hours, Weasley." then she stuck her nose back into her book.

Neville just laughed. Ron was always hungry, he had to admit that he was always hungry about this time too. Tea would be wonderful.

Harry sighed again. "I want some tea. I know you all do to. So... Service please."

An elf popped in, glanced around then asked, "Young master wishes something?"

Hermione started to say something, then shut her mouth. If the elf thought it shouldn't obey Harry, it wouldn't.

Harry thought for a moment. "Could you bring me the things to make tea?" the elf nodded. "Thank you. And whatever is needed to make sandwiches."

"Very good, young sir. Tippy is being back in a moment." And the elf disappeared, returning a minute later with a huge tray with everything needed to make tea and sandwiches.

Harry glanced at Neville, who grinned and started assembling sandwiches. Harry poured water into the tea pot then dumped it into a waste bowl. He added tea leaves to the warm pot and poured in more hot water. While they waited for the tea to brew, Neville and Harry finished the sandwiches.

Ron watched with interest while the other two boys worked. Hermione had her nose so firmly in a book that only taking it away from her would gain her attention. When the sandwiches were ready, Ron reached out to grab one and got the back of his hand firmly smacked.

"Ow! What'd you do that for?" Ron's indignant exclamation caught Hermione's attention.

Harry spoke before she could. "Wait until you are invited, you oaf. Lady's first and all that. Right Neville?"

Neville nodded. "Yes, and Hermione should be asked to be mother."

Harry looked blank. "Mother? Nani?"

Hermione settled on her knees next to Harry. "Mother in England doesn't only mean your female parent. It also means to play hostess. Unless you want to pour, as host?"

Ron butted in with, "I don't care who pours as long as I get tea." He tried a conciliating look that mostly just made him look vaguely ill. "Please?"

Harry snickered, "Fine, fine. You won't starve before we get it poured. Hermione, if you would? I'll fix plates, shall I?"

Neville just settled back in his chair to wait. Ron pouted but grumbled, "I suppose so."

Hermione poured tea and added sugar, milk or lemon as required. No one was surprised to see that she remembered how everyone liked their tea. Harry put the carefully constructed ham and cheese and watercress and butter sandwiches on plates, then handed them around.

They settled in with Hermione and Harry still kneeling on the floor Japanese style.

After a few moments, Hermione winced and squirmed around. "Ouch! Yusuke-kun, how do you kneel like this for hours? My legs are falling asleep already."

"Practice. No one much, at least in my family, uses Western chairs. Also, it would help if you wouldn't bend your toes like that." He grasped her arm firmly. "Here, let me help you." He waved his hand and transfigured a zabuton out of something. "First, I don't know much of anyone who will kneel on a bare floor for long, unless it's a punishment. And sit sieza, with the top of your foot on the floor, not with your toes bent under. That's called kiza and can lead to all sorts of difficulties. Not only with your tendons but it's considered a bit ... untrusting. But you go into kiza before you ... there's no English word for this and the Japanese word doesn't begin to translate. If you're just going out a door or moving a few feet there's two ways to do it. Getting up and walking isn't one of them. You can walk on the balls of your feet if you have good enough balance or you can knee walk. Called Shikkō. Ladies usually don't shikkō they toe walk." As he'd been talking, he was also helping Hermione get into position. "There. Better?"

Hermione smiled at Harry. "Yes, Yusuke-kun, much. Arigato."

Harry picked up his tea cup and returned, "Do itashimashti." He took a sip of tea and sighed.

Ron just managed to keep his mouth shut by cramming half a sandwich into it. Who cared about all that stuff?

Harry noticed Ron's action and the expression on his face. The boy was a total barbarian. He returned to his tea with a frown.

He jumped when his elastic broke and his hair fell to cascade around his neck and shoulders. "Shimatta! Nani yo? Fucking elastic. Damn it, I just bought a whole pack and they're all like this." He pulled another out of his pocket and swept his hair back into its customary high ponytail.

Hermione blinked for a moment then asked a bit hesitantly "Um... Yusuke-kun? Why don't you just use a charm?"

Harry finished banding his hair as he asked, "As I live with a bunch of yak ... men, and I'm not allowed near the women. Who's going to teach me?"

Hermione sighed, "I never thought of that. Ok, here's how it works." She demonstrated the wand movements and said the charm. Then everyone knew why she didn't use it on herself. Her bushy hair looked even worse in a tail. "And that is why I never use that charm. I wish I knew a good hair straightening one."

Harry glanced at her then at Neville. "So ... why haven't you researched one? There have to be sources you can trust. Yes?"

Hermione just sighed. "Probably, but try to find them up here in the wilds of Scotland. Madam Pince, the librarian, just sort of glowered at me when I asked her. Never mind that." Hermione finished her tea and put the last of her sandwich aside. "It's nearly time for dinner, then we have to go to the juku and study. Yusuke-kun?"

"Yes, Hermione-chan?" Harry knew what she was going to ask.

"Do you really have to workout so much? It's getting in the way of your studies." Hermione's hopeful look made Neville grimace.

"Yes, I really do. And it does not get in the way of my studies. I believe I'm actually a bit insulted by the suggestion that I would slack on any of my obligations." Harry produced a cigarette and started smoking. He was upset that she would suggest such a thing. He was a good and dutiful son.

Hermione bit her lip then forged on. "But, Yusuke-kun, if you spend four hours a day on silly exercises, you're sure to get behind. The recommended ratio of revising to class time is four to one. So

that's..." she stopped to make a calculation. "eight to twelve hours of outside time per class per week."

Harry chose to take exception to this. "Not really. The ratio is per class hour, it does not include laboratory time. So potions only takes four hours as does Herbology. And, they're not silly. I am expected to be able to do certain things on demand. Cease badgering me about it. If I should fall behind in my studies, you may certainly say, 'I told you so.'" He glowered for a moment. "Although, I really wouldn't recommend it."

Ron finished his collection of sandwiches just then and, swallowing thickly, announced, "Granger, leave off. Please. Picking on him isn't going to do any of us any good. And alienating him really isn't helping. Come on, Harry, we both better change before dinner. I'm all sweaty. I bet you are too."

Harry seized on that as an opportunity to escape Hermione's hectoring. He got up and followed Ron up to the dorm.

Ron turned before Harry could get to his bed and asked, "You ok, mate? I thought you looked like you could use a break. She really does mean well." He shrugged at Harry's questioning look. "I know. What's going on. She doesn't like me much and I don't blame her either. But I keep an eye on all my year mates. Dunno, just seems like something I should do. Especially her, and a couple of younger ones as well. The Creavey brothers ... they're the photo nuts. And that's what gets them in trouble."

Ron continued with a stream of comments that Harry seemed to ignore. He wasn't, he just stored them away for later consideration. He let the babble run over him, calming his jangled nerves. He hated Scotland, didn't like Hogwarts, and wasn't best pleased with Hermione right now. Ron, on the other hand, was beginning to grow on him. Neville was a calm in a sea of idiots.

.

Dinner went well. No one challenged Harry. Harry kept his eyes on his food.

Hermione thought he was sulking or something, but he was actually thinking about his mission for the night. He needed to get a good

look at the runes on the moving stairs. This was going to be a pain as every time someone tried to see the end of the staircase, the stairs stopped moving which brought a professor running. He'd found out that this was a not so safety feature meant to keep someone clinging to the end of the last riser from being crushed when the end reconnected to a landing. The only problem was, this usually put the victim out of reach of rescuers, unless they knew levitation spells like mobilicorpus.

Harry thought that the sixth and seventh years could take care of themselves and anyone nearby. That, however, did not help anyone under that year as they couldn't help themselves or each other and were usually in the way of anyone trying to get to the victim. Wizards did have a tendency to stand around, screaming, when something went wrong, getting in the way of rescuers by milling around like sheep.

When dinner was over they returned to the common room and Harry approached Ron. He bowed slightly then said, "Ron-kun, far be it from me to say something in a land whose customs I am unfamiliar with but ... in Japan it is not seemly for a man to eat as you do. Pray strive to keep your food within your mouth by speaking only when you have swallowed. Yes?" He pinned Ron with a steely glare. "Or I might find myself disgusted enough to ... take steps?" He smiled genially at Neville who was sitting nearby. "Is that the correct phrase?"

Neville just nodded, then returned to the book he was reading, vowing to be very careful of his manners for awhile. Ron gulped then nodded, he kept his mouth firmly shut, realizing that something his Mum had been telling him for years had come to pass, he'd finally made someone with real power notice his manners.

Hermione glanced at the non-confrontation then back to her book. "Yusuke-kun, I think I found what you want." Harry ambled over to see. "Look here. Hogwarts: a History has information on every facet of Hogwarts. Here are the runes that make the stairs work. They're carved into the ends of the last riser on each section."

Harry took the book and examined the runes carefully. He was sure that what he'd seen was different, somehow. He fished his brush pen out of his pocket and got a scrap of parchment from a scattered pile on the table. He copied the runes from Hermione's book and



walked out the common room door. He was going to get a good look at those runes if he had to demolish a staircase to do it.

He wandered up and down the stairs until he decided on the slowest moving one then he sat on the newel post and watched as the staircase swung back and forth between two landings.

After twenty minutes of patient watching, he had the runes copied. As he studied the differences between the runes in the book and the runes on the stairs he realized that the differences were from wear. The ends of the cases had rubbed against the landings as they moved and meshed. In order to fix that, he'd have to re-carve, then recharge, the entire array. This was not something he was going to do. It was way too much work and moving stairs just weren't something he could see as being appropriate to a school with young children. A college, yes; a secondary school, no. Definitely not. Instead, he was going to stop the whole thing. No more moving stairs. He laughed to himself, he was sure that no one would be able to figure out what had happened. He put his things into a thigh pocket and went back to the common room then up to his dorm. He settled at his desk and stuck his nose firmly into his potions book.

He worked, reading ahead and taking notes, until Ron and Seamus thundered in. They crashed and banged around for a few moments then Seamus said something in Irish and rushed out again.

"Ok, so what is so important that you have to interrupt my studies like a couple of Visigoths?" Harry clutched his patience with both hands.

"Oh, sorry. Didn't see you over in that corner. Not that there's a whole lot of those in a round room after all." Ron did manage to look apologetic. "Seamus wanted to show the twins some muggle thing he had. So we came up to get it. What are you reading?"

Harry made a face. "Potions. Snape doesn't like me, and I have no idea what insult I gave him. He's ... going to be difficult, and I don't need that."

Ron wasn't very helpful, just rejoining, "Well, he's a prat, so what do you expect?"

Harry made a rude noise then said, "I expect him to teach. It is what he's being paid for, right?"

Neville, who had come up for his exploding snap cards, interjected, "Yusuke-sama, you are doomed to disappointment if you expect him to do anything you expect. He's as perverse as they come."

Harry nodded. "I suppose I should make him a bit afraid of me then. I won't put up with him in my face all the time." Harry thought about the ramifications of having a professor like Snape causing scenes at every turn. He was afraid that the man would do something unforgivable and he'd have to retaliate. He decided to give it a bit more time before he made a decision. Let Snape start whatever he pleased, or not start anything. Harry preferred to be proactive, but in this case reactive seemed a better path to follow.

Ron and Neville both gave him a strangely fearful look. Then Neville said, "Yusuke-kun, don't take this the wrong way but ... you really don't want to start anything with Snape. He's rumored to be a reformed Death Eater turned spy for Dumbledore. Not someone I would want to mess with."

Harry thought for a second. "So, they let him teach? With that sort of reputation? Interesting. Not smart, but very interesting. As to Death Eaters, was he inner circle or outer? And how powerful is he really? Not his reputation, his actual power?"

Ron thought about Harry's questions for a moment. Neville got that worried look he sometimes got when he just knew his uncle was going to try something.

Ron spoke before Neville could gather his thoughts. "Well, they obviously let him teach so that's rhetorical. His reputation is exactly that, a reputation. Dumbledore believes in second chances. As to being a Death Eater. I asked my Dad about that in first year. He was a Death Eater at first but he got scared or changed his mind or something. No one's really clear about that. He was inner circle after awhile. And how powerful is he? No one is really sure. Potions don't require a lot of power, just subtlety, which he has a lot of. But his reputation is that he has a lot more power than he lets on. Flitwick respects his dueling. So now you know as much as I do."

Neville gulped then said, "He's powerful. Uncle Algie was scared to death of him. He constantly told me that Snape would cut me up for potions ingredients and get away with it. He got really angry at him and hexed him. Uncle spent three weeks in St. Mungo's before they could reverse it. Best three weeks of my life that year."

It took Harry a second to separate out the 'he's'. Then he decided that Snape had hexed Algernon, which was a good thing. However, the fact that it had taken a hospital three weeks to reverse it was bad.

"I thank you for your information. I'll keep your advice in mind. Now, I really want to finish this essay. Wouldn't do for me to be handing it in late." He returned to his book.

Ron glanced over his shoulder. "Harry, that's not in English."

Harry just shrugged. "Translation spell. I keep wondering why you all expect me to read and write English when I haven't done either in years. I had Japanese tutors, read and wrote only kanji, katakana, and hiragana. I had English as a Second Language instructors so I wouldn't forget how to speak English. But they didn't teach reading or writing, only conversational English. Now, go."

Ron started to say something smart but Neville grabbed his arm and dragged him out.

His voice drifted up the stairs. "Ron, do not antagonize him. He's a lot more dangerous than he lets on." Ron's mumble carried but Harry couldn't understand him. "I know. But, I know something, but it won't come." The rest of their conversation faded away.

Harry returned to his book.

Time passed and the dorm went silent as the other boys found their beds. Harry continued to read, ignoring them.

When he was sure they were all asleep, Harry got up, turned down his lamps and left the room.

He made his way down to the common room and out into the central staircase. The grinding and thumping of the stairs as they changed positions was the only sound to be heard. Harry listened carefully for

any sound that anyone was nearby but the noise of the stairs could, and did, hide much.

Harry glanced around then smirked a bit. This was actually going to be easier than expected. His researches, quietly done behind the screen of homework, had told him that all he had to do was deface the runes more completely. The worn one was still partially active. He began the ingei that would begin the concentration of ki needed to work his will. He kept the rune he wanted to destroy carefully fixed in his mind's eye. He also needed to limit the area of effect, just in case that rune was used in something else in the castle. It wouldn't do to carelessly damage some other spell or warding.

He felt the concentration of ki build to uncomfortable levels, this was the signal that it was time to release his spell. He curved his hands as if holding a ball then flicked them out as if he was throwing it. Darts of light flew from his extended fingers to each rune. The runes simply disappeared from their places with a flash of light. The stairs ground to a halt where ever they'd been when the spell was activated.

Harry examined the results of his spell for a moment, over half the staircases now ended in midair. "Well, that's not much help." He looked the mess over again, trying to decide what to do.

Finally, he settled for arranging each case in the most sensible, to him, arrangement, which meant that there was a solid case up one side of the stair well with flights over to landings at the opposite side. He smiled to himself, let them all wonder what the hell had happened. At least no one was going to fall.

Stairs fixed.

Harry decided to make an early night of it and went to bed.

.

The next morning was Saturday, which meant that no one but Snape and Filch were awake early. Or rather, out early. McGonagall, Flitwick and Vector; as well as many other professors kept to their quarters for most of the morning, either resting or doing paperwork. They had breakfast in their quarters. The rest drifted in at their leisure.

Only, today, most of the professors were gathered at the base of the central stairs, looking up and around in puzzlement. The stairs had quit moving sometime in the night and no one had the faintest idea why. Nor would they ever. Every attempt they made to figure things out failed, in some cases, rather spectacularly.

Harry just excused himself, slipped by the clump of bodies and went into the Great Hall to have his usual breakfast of miso, rice, smoked fish and tea. He was very pleased with himself. His exercises were going well and no one else would ever fall off those damned stairs again.

.

A Thiarna Dia – Lord God! (He's Irish)

okami – police (actually wolves, but the yakuza call them that. And things less complimentary)

Thanks to WarmasterSamiel for the line "a man of your experience will surely need no explanation for how my magic works"

Harry occupied most of his day by sneaking out to explore the Forbidden Forest. He enjoyed his time there, but realized why it would be forbidden to most students. Acromantulas, aside, it was great fun.

He was well aware that he was expected to have tea with Professor McGonagall, so he got back in plenty of time to bathe; a proper bath, not one of those hasty things the Westerners insisted was good enough. He dressed in formal kamishimo, with hakama, hakama-shita and kataginu. He preferred the more narrow shouldered modern style, but the kataginu still carried the three mon of an older style.

Tea with McGonagall was all that he feared and hoped it would be.

Harry entered and sat in the chair McGonagall pointed to. "Thank you."

"You are welcome. Sugar?" Professor McGonagall poured tea and offered the usual sugar, lemon, milk cream. She totally ignored his choice of garb.

"Plain, thank you." Harry accepted the cup of tea, noticing that it was red instead of the green he was accustomed to. "Can you tell me something?"

"I can try." McGonagall hoped it wasn't too personal.

"Why do the English call this tea black, when it is clearly red?" Harry had always wondered about that.

"Because the leaves are black." She sighed, "Well, that was easy enough. Sandwich? I have water cress and butter or ..." She eyed the finger sandwich in her hand for a moment. "Egg salad on whole wheat. There's also biscuits and scones."

Harry helped himself to cress and butter and a bite size scone topped with Devon cream and some sort of red jam. "Thank you." He nibbled on the scone. "Mmmm. Red currant? Very nice. Now, I'm not much for politeness." Harry lied blandly. "I'm much too straight forward for my father's comfort. What is your problem with me? What did I ever do to offend you? I'd really like to know." He sat back and waited for answers. He knew he'd put her off balance by

being so direct. He wondered if English children were more circumspect than this. Probably. They were probably scared of what might happen to them if they put adults on the spot.

Professor McGonagall did her best not to choke on her tea. This Harry Potter was nothing like the boy she had expected. She'd never been to Japan, never been out of Scotland more than a handful of times. But she could read and had read up on Japan and Japanese manners. These direct questions put her on the defensive, something she wasn't used to and didn't like.

"Well, Mr Potter, you are direct, aren't you? So ... My problem is ... you're not what I expected and that puts me out. Also, you refuse to use your real name. Potter is an ancient and honorable name. And that is what offends me. James and Lily gave their lives for you and you reject them. Rather bad mannered of you, if I may say so."

Harry thought about this, trying to see it from her point of view. He had nearly finished his tea by the time he thought it over and came to some conclusions. He formed his reply carefully.

"Ah ... Sou ka. I see. Try looking at it from my point of view. I know nothing of my English family. I remember the Dursleys, of course, much as I'd rather forget them." He told the professor all that he could remember of his time at the Dursleys, then told her about living in Japan; suitably censored. At the end, he said, "So ... why would I honor the name of people I never heard of. Even though they gave their lives for me, my true father gave me life. I prefer to honor him, but I will not fight over a name. Those who know me will call me what I like, not what is ..." He waved a hand. "And as to the name being old. The Miyamoto name is one of the first in Japan. That means that it's over 3000 years old. The house I was raised in has been on that site, in one form or another, for that long. I work in the family business already. I am ... well known in Japan. By the name Miyamoto Yusuke. So ... yes, I do prefer that name, but I will save my fights for other things."

McGonagall had a lot to think about, but she put that aside for now and offered, "More tea?"

Harry accepted and talk drifted from one subject to another for a while. They reached a guarded understanding, Harry hoped so, at

least. He took his leave with a bow. Professor McGonagall rose to escort him to the door.

"Well, Mr Potter, I think we understand each other a bit better. I'll try to ... be a bit more flexible. If you remember that I knew your parents very well. Good day to you." She opened the door and watched him leave, wondering exactly why he gave her chills. It was something about his eyes, she thought.

.

Harry wandered around for a while, thinking about McGonagall and her expectations. She expected things that he could not and would not deliver. This made her angry, anger that she shifted onto him. He thought she might not be a very good head of house to him. He decided not to trust her much without more proof of her intentions.

He decided to find Neville, avoid Ron, and drag his friend off to ask more questions of him.

This was not to be however, Ron caught him before he could reach the outer courtyard.

"Harry, there you are. Hermione wanted to go over some of the first and second year charms with you. She thought you were a bit shaky on them. Tough luck, mate. She's relentless." Ron didn't touch Harry, which was a good thing. But he did stay right by his side until he turned and went back inside.

Hermione was waiting for them in the juku. The second they entered, she started in.

"Yusuke-san! There you are. I've been thinking that perhaps you might need some practice with spells that you're not that familiar with. We can start with the spells you had trouble with, from first year through fifth, then go on to get in some practice on this week's assignment."

Harry glowered at her for a moment then snarled, "And you decided this all on your own? You never thought to ask me what I want?" he took a deep breath. "I think I should leave before I say something unforgivable. Excuse me." he bowed and left quickly.



Hermione turned woeful eyes to Ron who just shrugged and said, "I told you. You're way too pushy. He's not going to put up with your shit, no matter. If you want to stay friends with him, I'd suggest you lighten up. If he needs help, be there; if not, don't nag him. I'm leaving too. No wonder you don't have any friends. Just sayin'." He left, leaving her to cry on her desk.

.

Harry took a quick trip back to his dorm to change into BDU's, t-shirt and soft boots. He also tucked several senbon into his left boot, to join the tanto in his right. He felt very uncomfortable without several weapons to hand at all times. He cast a charm to hide the bulges, and went back to the common room. Just in time to hear Ron bragging.

"So I gave her a bit of home truth and she's still in that study room of hers, bawling her eyes out. Stupid bint, thinks I'm a messenger boy. Well, I told her." He grinned around, not really noticing that even his twin brothers were looking at him with annoyance.

Ron had never understood that, while most of the house wasn't fond of Hermione, being truly cruel to her wasn't on the table. Not since the Terrible Twins had taken her under their wings.

No one was quite sure exactly why they'd done it. They weren't admitting that she was the source of some of their best pranks and a constant source of help in potions and charms. They were lordly seventh years, twice over; while she was just a fifth year. But everyone knew that she was under their protection. They'd pranked enough people to convince them of that.

Now, Harry heard Ron mocking Hermione and glowered at him. Ron never noticed but he felt a cold chill which made him shudder.

Harry just left, headed for the Juku.

.

Hermione sobbed into her sleeve. She just wanted to make sure that Yusuke didn't fail a class and have to repeat it, that would be horrible. But she wasn't that good at this sort of thing. She had told Ron to be sure to ask Harry to come see her, not order him around.

She was sure Ron had done it wrong on purpose and, of course, the second she'd seen him, she thought he understood what she was about. Show her to trust that ginger menace for a second. Now she had lost a friend.

She stiffened when she heard, "Hermione-chan, please don't cry. I'm no good with weeping females. Now. Come. Sit up and talk to me."

Hermione sniffled and took the tissue Harry offered. "I'm so sorry. I swear, I wasn't trying to be bossy. I told Ron to ask you to come study with me. But ... he's such a ... a ..." she let out a little shriek of annoyance. "A boy! Idiot! Prat! I'd love to give him one in the ... the..." she hiccuped, sniffled again and finished, "Well, you know."

Harry sighed, "I think ... he was bragging in the common room. I think he did it on purpose. His brothers were eyeing him in a way that ... I think he is doomed to some nasty pranks from them. Now ... shimaimasen, Granger-san. Hai? No more tears?" He wiped the last of her tears away with his thumbs. "I was angry at ... I assumed that it was your idea to order me around. But I did leave before I said something bad. Yes?"

"Yes, you did. Arigato. It's ok. I should have asked you directly and in person ... but boys are so prickly about girls helping them. I don't get it." She sighed heavily. "I'm sorry too. Ok? We're still friends?"

Harry chuckled a bit. "Yes, we're still friends. Friends fight and make up and fight again. We'll get over it. Now. What made you think I had trouble with those ... charms?"

"Well, Professor Flitwick made you do them twice. So I assumed ... yes ..." she held up a hand to keep Harry from saying it, "I know. Assuming makes an ass of you and me. So. Why did you have to do them twice?"

Harry grinned at her. "Because I forgot to use my wand the first time."

Hermione's jaw dropped, her mouth open in a very unladylike way. When she shut it, he was half way to the door. She took a deep breath, he slammed the door shut.

"MIYAMOTO YUSUKE! YOU ARSE!" Hermione pelted after him, robes hiked to her knees.

She finally caught him down by the lake.

"Yusuke-kun, I'm going to smack you good. Wandless magic? Really? How? Can you teach me? More importantly, will you?" Hermione flopped down on the shore beside Harry, panting slightly.

"No hitting." His grin was calm. "Yes, really. It's the way I was taught. Japanese people use different foci than Western people. I might be able to. I'm not a sensei by any means, but I'll try. We just have to find you a focus." He showed Hermione his rings. "I use rings. Some people use ... well, all sorts of things. But I can also do magic without any focus at all. It's just a lot harder. So ... not mad at me?" he tugged a lock of her hair.

"No. Not mad. Are you? I know you were ... irritated at first. But ... I'm sorry that prat Ron ordered you around. He's just ... I don't know ... just ..."

Harry snorted. "Never mind him. He earned some friendship points right off, but lost most of them with that trick. I'll be nice to him because I have to live with him, but I don't trust him. Not like Neville. Neville is ... good. In a way that I can't explain." He got up and picked up a flat rock. He skipped it across the lake, counting the splats.

Hermione stood up and did the same. She was comfortable with Harry in a way that she had never been with anyone before.

They skipped stones for a while, then sat down in a depression on the shore at the base of a huge old pine tree. It was nice and warm there, sheltered from the cold wind off the mountains behind Hogwarts.

They were just getting comfortable when Neville called, "Hi. Can I join you or am I a third wheel?"

Harry laughed. "No, you're not. We're just discussing Ron ... and the need to punish him thoroughly."

Hermione filled Neville in on what had happened, with Harry interjecting from time to time.

When they were finished, Neville grumbled, "Well, damn. Trust me to miss all the excitement from being in the greenhouses. But ... there you are. So ... what are you going to do to him? Can I help? And, please don't kill him." He laughed at their expressions. "Oh, don't get me wrong. I don't care if you kill him, but it'll get you talked about in the common rooms. You really should avoid that, if you can. So?"

Hermione choked back a rather hysterical laugh. "Oh, no, we wouldn't want that. Not at all. But ... Ron's an idiot. I don't really like him at all, no matter that I'm polite to him. So ... what can we do? We have to be careful not to get caught. Also, we have to do it in such a way that no one suspects us. That leaves any prank in the dorm out." she trailed off, thinking.

Harry just lit a cigarette and settled back to smoke and think. Neville just drifted off, snoring softly.

Hermione finally grumbled, "Damn. I can't think of anything that won't point right at me, or you. We better wake Neville, it's getting on for dark."

Harry gently poked Neville with his foot. "Neville-san, wake up. Time for dinner."

Neville snorted once then rolled over. He stood up and shook out his robes. "Ok, I'm sort of awake. Dinner?"

Harry stood beside Neville and waved one hand, dismissing the leaves and sand from his clothing. "Yes, dinner. Come on."

Hermione clambered to her feet last and grumbled at the mess her robes were in. She was wrinkled and had sand and something she was sure was snot on her sleeve. "Blast! I look like I was dragged through a hedge." She started to clear up her mess when it all disappeared. "Oh, thank you, Yusuke-kun."

Harry flicked the fan in his hand again, then shut it and tucked it into his belt. "Come on, we'll be late."

Dinner was accompanied by the information that Professor Lockhart was starting a Dueling Club, it's first meeting to be on Monday after dinner. Neville sighed heavily, at Harry's inquiring look he said, "This is not going to turn out well. I just know it."

.

Harry woke at three am. He'd stayed up, reading, as usual. His need for sleep was still limited. He remembered the physician that he'd been taken to several years ago. The man had done ETKTMS and said that Harry just didn't need that much sleep. He also said that trying to make Harry sleep when he didn't need too was just as bad as not getting enough sleep. Musashi had told Harry to stay up as late as he needed too but that he was to sleep himself out every night. He'd obeyed, why wouldn't he? His father only had his best interests in heart.

So he wondered why he was awake when he'd set himself to wake at five. Then he heard it again.

"Hungry! So hungry! Must find food. Where food?" The voice was very soft and seemed far away.

Harry decided to go find the hungry creature and see if he couldn't get it some food. He hated to think of anything being hungry.

It wasn't long until he ran afoul of Filch

It was unfortunate that the old squib touched him before he was really aware of his presence. Harry was too busy trying to pin down the strange voice he was hearing to notice him. His father would be displeased.

"Ha! I gotcha! You little bastards. Sneaking around, doing who knows what. Well, we'll just see about this. Dumbledore will ..." he stopped speaking when Harry pulled the tanto out of his boot, reversed their positions with a simple back flip and put the tanto to his unshaven throat.

"He'll do nothing. What? I don't attend detentions. And he's surely not going to expel me. So ... what is it that he is going to do? Or you? Do you really think you can force me? Pray try." He pushed the

old man away with one hand and tucked his knife away with the other. "I'm bored now. Good night."

Harry went back to the dorm but didn't bother to try to sleep, he was now wide awake. He was a bit startled when a large, long haired cat jumped up onto his bed. He petted her for awhile then pushed her to the foot of his bed. "Lay there, if you like, Neko." He pulled the edge of the coverlet up to cover her. She blinked at him for a moment then went to sleep.

An hour later the lynx like creature got up, stretched and patted Harry on the foot with one paw. He smiled down at her and said, "I'm awake, Neko. And up." He ran one hand down her back, pulled her tail gently and slid off the bed. He decided to run an extra lap today and do several extra kata, he was getting a bit lazy. And it wasn't like he didn't have plenty of time.

After a heavy workout that left him sweating and panting, he meditated. He managed to calm himself once again. He really didn't like Hogwarts, it felt off to him. It's magic was too different from what he was used to. And he was still angry about being forced here against his will and he knew well enough exactly where to place the blame.

After a shower, he felt more or less human again. He dressed in his usual and picked up the cat to bring her down to the common room. She struggled a bit but he calmed her with a pat and a whispered, "No, Neko, I don't want you on those stairs. You'll fall and I'll feel bad." The cat seemed to understand him, even though he spoke in Japanese.

Neville just gawked at them for a moment then stammered, "That's Mrs Norris. She's Filch's cat. She hates ... everyone." His expansive gesture made Mrs Norris hiss. "See?"

Harry just petted her a bit then let her drop to the floor. "I don't know about that. See seemed nice enough to me. Maybe she just doesn't like ... you lot because you're too rough. Cats don't like a lot of noise and rough housing."

Hermione asked, "Who doesn't?" then she saw the cat. "Oh, Mrs Norris. She's rather stand offish. Doesn't like Crookshanks much." She opened the door and let the cat scamper past her. "Well? Come

on then. I'm hungry, then, I have to research a few things before class tomorrow."

Harry just gave Neville a telling look, before following her down to breakfast.

Harry asked Hermione what, exactly, she had to research as they walked down the now still stairs. "I'm researching Lockhart. He's really ... well, the timeline is really off as you know. But I'm trying to find out who might have actually done what he claims to have. All I get are, 'I don't remember anything' in various forms. Something's fishy and it isn't the sushi." Hermione frowned at a portrait, which returned a vaguely insulted stare.

The settled in to eat breakfast but were interrupted about half way through by Draco Malfoy.

Draco had received a letter from Lucius which flatly told him to make sure not to insult Miyamoto Yusuke, whatever name he was using; and, if he had, to apologize at once.

Harry glanced at him then the box he carried.

Draco offered it to Harry, stammering, "I thought ... well, Father commands. Um ... this is for you. Oranges and apples from our hot houses. I hope ... you like them. Excuse me." Draco caught a good look at Harry's jade green eyes. The look in them made him flee back to the Slytherin table, swearing to himself.

Hermione gazed after him then remarked, "Well, that was interesting. What the heck was his problem?"

Harry blinked for a moment then said, "I do believe he had a letter from his father. Perhaps he, Draco's father, I mean, had some good advice? I do hope so. We have had a couple of talks. Nothing much, but I'm not sure I like him." He smiled sweetly. "And people I really don't like have a bad habit of having accidents with sharp things. Most unfortunate."

Neville sighed, there was that feeling again. He was going to have to have a real sit down and think.

Harry opened the box and waved his hand over it. The fruit was safe, ripe and looked delicious. He helped himself to an orange and motioned to Hermione, Neville and Fred to help themselves. Ron reached for something but got his hand slapped for his troubles. George wandered by, raised an eyebrow at Harry; and, when he got a nod, took an orange.

Harry glanced at a pouting Ron then pinned him with an icy glare. "The next time you lie to me, even by omission, I'll cut your lying tongue out. Do you understand me?"

Ron gulped and nodded. Fred and George had already had words with him about setting Hermione up. Harry patted his cheek in a gentle way then wandered off. Ron took a bite of eggs without thought then sprouted boils the size of shillings. He whimpered softly but continued to eat. The boils would go away and he was very sure that any visit to Madam Pomfrey would only result in further retaliation.

Harry glanced over his shoulder at the noise then continued on his way. Ron wasn't off the hook yet.

Hermione swiped at her hair and followed Neville up to the juku to finish her studies. "I swear, Yusuke doesn't seem to do a lick of homework but he's done already. What is going on?"

Neville decided that this wasn't a secret so he just said, "I don't think he sleeps more than four hours a night. I woke up Tuesday at ... well, that would make it Wednesday, at two and he was at his desk, writing something. He's done with all his reading and his essays already. And none of it is due until next week. Don't fuss at him, it's not a good idea. He said something the other day about bushes or something. Seemed really mad."

Hermione just sighed, of course, bushido. Harry would do his homework because it was his duty as a student to do it. She had questioned his honor when she implied that he wouldn't have it done on time. "Never mind, Neville. I have a book you can read about bushido. I think ... Harry's been trained as a samurai. We really better watch ourselves so we don't get him mad at us for what we might consider stupid things. But they won't be stupid to him."



Neville just nodded. He'd heard a few vague things about that. A samurai would make a friend then keep him or her until death and do everything possible to assure their safety and happiness. He was very glad to have a friend like Yusuke.

.

Harry wandered the grounds, thinking about everything he'd learned. It seemed that the English Wizards had a problem with a Dark Lord named Voldemort. And there was a prophecy that he, Harry, Yusuke, whatever, was the only one who could kill him. He sighed. What the hell? They wanted him to do a job for them; and, instead of paying him, they kept his money? This wasn't going to fly. Not for a second.

He settled down and pulled writing materials from a pocket. He wrote a letter to his father, sealed it and pocketed it. He'd put it in his letter box and Gringotts would deliver it to his father as soon as possible. Much sooner than an owl could make it.

If these idiots wanted a job done, they were going to pay for it. Or it wouldn't get done. Simple.

If Voldemort was stupid enough to bring the fight to him? Well, that was another story all together. He absently fingered the tanto in his boot. He was going to have to re-evaluate what he carried with him and where he carried it.

He started back to Hogwarts, thinking about this and that on the way.

His thoughts were, 'Bombs, yes. I definitely should carry some C4 at least. Don't need detonators for that. And some prima cord too. My best ninjato and a katana. Wakazashi? Yes. Senbon? Or Kunai? Perhaps both. Baretta 93R, of course. A chain dart and a seven section whip. You can never have too many sharps. By the time he was back to the main doors, he had made up his mind. He was going loaded for bear from now on.

A trip to his room saw him tucking things into mallet space, his pockets and his hair. He was sure that no one would realize that the hair tie he was wearing was wrapped around prima cord. The C4 tucked into one pocket looked enough like clay that he wasn't much worried. Of course, he didn't have to worry at all, wizards wouldn't even know what C4 was.

The rest of the day went well as he stayed in the common room, visiting with other members of his house.

.

Monday classes were interesting in that Harry turned in the first of his homework. In Kanji, or hiragana or katakana, as was appropriate to the task at hand. Flitwick just took the work with a slight smile. He'd expected something like this and was prepared with a translation spell. He put the pages into Harry's folder without comment, smirking slightly at Harry as he did so.

Harry, for his part, just grinned at the small professor and settled back in his seat. Hermione huffed at his expression but kept her peace. She was treading on thin ice with Yusuke and had no intention of making the heavy step that would break through. Neville patted her on the shoulder in appreciation.

When Harry turned in his Transfiguration work, Professor McGonagall took one look at it and demanded to know what he was playing at.

"Sorry? I'm not playing at anything." Harry gave his head of house a look that was clearly a warning.

Professor McGonagall was not a stupid woman by any means so, instead of throwing what is rudely called a wobbly, she snapped, "This is not in English. I'm actually not sure what it is in."

Harry shrugged elegantly as he replied, "Since I don't read or write English, it's written in ... mostly hiragana, with some kanji and katakana thrown in as necessary."

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, closed it, thought for a moment then said, "Of course you don't. What ... how much English do you remember?"

"Not much. I wasn't good in school because I got a thumping for cheating if I did better than Dudley. So?..." he thought for a moment. "About second grade in vocabulary and spelling. I'm not sure about anything else as grammar is completely different in Nihon."

The professor gave up. This was not going to become a bone of contention between them. "Very well. I'll just have to ask Filius for a good translation spell. Return to your seat, please."

Harry grinned at Neville as he settled back in his seat. This was going much better than he'd expected.

Lunch went by in quiet conversation with Hermione being happy to just listen carefully for once. Harry was happy to see that she seemed to be thinking about her attitude more carefully. He was pleased by this and let it show.

Neville offered to help him with his English, with Hermione seconding the offer, he refused politely saying, "No, I thank you, I have no need for it outside of Hogwarts. To me it's just wasted effort. The professors can use a translating spell or fail me and I don't care which." His expression became thoughtful. "Although, Father may have something to say about it. Still ... I think I'll take my chances."

Hermione opened her mouth to harangue Harry about this attitude. She thought quickly then shut it. Harry gave her a brilliant smile and said, "Arigato, Hermione-chan. Think before you speak, then be silent if you can't be helpful. Well done." Hermione couldn't help but beam at that.

After she gathered her thoughts, she asked a question. "Yusuke-kun, why don't you use a translation spell yourself?"

"Because I don't want to be here, I don't care about my grades; sacrilegious as that seems, and they need to do some of the work themselves. It's only proper after all." Harry waited to hear what Hermione might say about that.

Hermione, for her part, had more to think about. She knew that Yusuke had been threatened into coming to Hogwarts, no one made a secret of that, especially after her friend made a point of telling everyone, several times. He seemed to like rubbing their noses in it. Also, why did a ministry full of Aurors, Unspeakables and other fully trained wizards and witches seem to think that Harry was the one to do their job for them. She didn't believe, for a second, that a prophecy was a good reason to put a sixteen year old on the front lines of a war.

When she finally spoke, all she said was, "Well, try to be polite about it. Ok?"

Harry's reply was a simple, "Hn." a sound he'd copied from one of his favorite anime.

Hermione blinked then groaned, "Oh, shimatta, do not go all Heero Yuy on me."

Harry corrected, "Yuy Heero. Tough." then grinned at her, produced a cigarette and wandered away.

Neville looked confused but shrugged when Hermione said, "Anime, Neville, a Japanese ..." he quit listening about two seconds after his name and just nodded from time to time, saying, "Oh, ok."

.

After dinner, most of the upper year students gathered in the Great Hall to witness the start of the new Dueling Club.

Lockhart came out and made a fool of himself. His duel with Snape took two seconds with Snape coming out on top with a smug smirk on his face.

Harry turned to the boy next to him and said, "Well, that's that. The club is over?"

The lantern jawed boy turned and said, in one of those 'Etonian' accents that have to be learned from a speech therapist, "Excuse me?"

Harry bowed slightly, "Miyamoto Yusuke, or Harry Potter, if you prefer. I was wondering if the club was done now. Since the faculty adviser is ... hors de combat? Is that the proper phrase?"

The boy nodded once. "Justin Finch-Fletchley. Yes, it is. I don't think so. Snape is still up and going. Bad show, though. Isn't the thing to show up a celebrity like Lockhart."

Harry made a face. "Lockhart-san is a fraud. He can't be in two places at once but he claims to have been. The events in books two

and three seem to have happened within days of each other, on opposite sides of Europe. Alternately."

Justin looked a bit outraged at that. "Oh, are you sure?"

Harry shook his head, making the end of his high ponytail whisper against his shoulder. "No. But Granger-san is. I'm satisfied."

"Oh, well, if Granger says something, it's usually right. Irritating sort, she is. But ... what's going on now?"

They returned their attention to the dueling platform where Lockhart was arguing with Snape. Lockhart gestured to Draco and Snape shook his head. He gestured to Harry and, when Lockhart nodded his approval, also to Flitwick. The professor of Charms smiled in a rather feral way and nodded his head.

"Well, since the last duel was such a fiasco, Professor Lockhart has agreed to place me in charge of the rest of this meeting while he ... recovers his ... composure. So ..." Snape smiled at the group, something that was rather frightening. "we have agreed that Mr Potter should face Professor Flitwick while I do a commentary. If you will, gentlemen?"

Justin made a faintly despairing face. "Oh, dear, you're in for it now. Professor Flitwick is just a little fellow but he's a past master at dueling. Held an international championship until a couple of years ago. You can only win ... I believe it's eight times before you have to retire for ten years. He was not in a good mood all that year, from what I've heard." He patted Harry on the back. "Just do your best."

Harry was happy to hear this. He had been sure he knew the small man but he couldn't remember where from. Now he remembered. He'd never actually seen him up close, but the second year he'd been in Japan his father had taken him to see the International Dueling Championship. He'd seen Flitwick fight his last duels and announce his retirement.

He mounted the platform and waited. Snape approached him to ask, "I want to know that you are willing to participate in this. Lockhart ..."

"Is an ass, Snape-sensei. He ... we will not discuss him, please. I am willing. If Flitwick-Kyooju is willing. I don't want him ... coerced either." Harry glanced over Shape's shoulder at the other professor.

Professor Flitwick just nodded at Harry. He was willing; interested, in fact.

So it was that Miyamoto Yusuke faced Filius Flitwick in a duel. It certainly wasn't Harry Potter on that platform. At least, not the Harry Potter that everyone seemed to think they knew.

Harry bowed to his opponent, pleased to see that Professor Flitwick didn't take his eyes off him when he bowed back. Harry was glad Flitwick knew that it was disrespectful to take his eyes off his opponent.

They started by feeling each other out. Flitwick cast a tickling hex, very over powered but still a 'safe' start. Harry blocked it with an ofuda, flinging the paper to intercept the charm. The resulting explosion was minor and a rather pretty pink. Flitwick smiled happily.

Harry then replied with a jelly legs jinx that Flitwick jumped over. And the battle was on.

Most of the students and some of the faculty couldn't really keep track of what was going on. All they could really see were flashes of spells being exchanged and Harry and Flitwick jumping, rolling and diving. Snape kept up a running commentary on what he could see, or as much of it as he could keep up with. Finally, after nearly twenty minutes, Flitwick got in a lucky stunner and knocked Harry out of the air. Even Harry was impressed when he enervated him before he could hit the platform, giving him time to flip in the air and land on his feet.

He staggered a bit, still dizzy from the stunner but he landed in a defensive posture, eyes on Flitwick. Flitwick bowed to him, giving him the bow of equals. Harry bowed back.

"Well fought, Sensei. Thank you for a great bout." Harry started toward the smaller man to shake hands. He stopped cold when a voice cried out, "Serpensortia!" and a snake suddenly appeared between him and his opponent.

Flitwick started to cast some spell but Lockhart interrupted him. "I've got it." He extended his wand in a theatrical gesture and shouted a spell. It didn't do much good as all it did was blast the snake to the rafters. It dropped back to the platform, landing heavily.

Now, as anyone with a brain knows, snakes hate flying, they'll climb trees but that's about it. This snake landed pissed off and ready for anything. He darted from one side of the platform to the other so quickly that only Snape, Flitwick and Harry could keep track of him. There were a few screams but Snape's acidic, "Yes, let's all upset it even more by screaming." quickly shut them up.

Justin Finch-Fletchley suppressed the urge to scream like a girl, the snake had just zeroed in on him. He was now faced with a very unhappy cobra, hood open, ready to strike and all he could do was stare at it. If he moved for his wand, it would strike him, right in the face. He froze in place.

Harry, meanwhile, was trying to decide whether to hex Lockhart to bits or rescue the boy in the Hufflepuff robes. He decided that the boy was more immediate, he could always hex the professor later.

He turned to the snake and said, in Parseltongue, "Do not bite him. He is no threat to you. Come to me."

The snake turned to Harry and hissed, "What? Why am I here? What is going on?"

Harry just walked over and picked up the now very confused snake and replied, "Big play fight. Someone got a bit too ... wanted to win too much. I'll send you back home now. Good hunting." He tapped the snake with a finger and it just disappeared with a soft pop.

He looked up to see everyone staring at him in a mix of fear and/or horror. He was more or less used to this sort of behavior so he ignored it in favor of asking Justin, "Oi! Fitch-Flechey you ok?"

Justin snatched his attention back from the edge of terror to reply, "It's Finch-Fletchley. Yes, I'm fine. Um ... what did you say to that snake?"

Harry shrugged, grinned and said, "I told it not to bite you because you weren't good to eat."

Justin snickered, a bit hysterically, it's true, "Ok. And, I think I'm a bit too big for it too. Thanks awfully. I really wouldn't like to be bitten."

Harry hopped off the platform to pat Justin on the shoulder. "No, you really wouldn't. You'd have been really sick, even with a bezoar. Come on. Let's sit down a sec. You look like you need it." He tugged at Justin to get him moving.

That was when everything seemed to begin to move again. People shouted, girls screamed, professors shouted orders. Ron Weasley proclaimed to anyone who would listen that Harry was Dark because he was a Parslemouth. Hermione just ordered tea for Justin while Flitwick started getting those who were not directly involved out of the Great Hall.

Snape, true to form, took his ire out on Lockhart, sending him to the right about with a snarky, "Well, it does seem that you've cast the cat amongst the pigeons, you idiot."

Lockhart just whimpered, he was well aware that the glare Snape was sending him implied future pain. He didn't see the look that Harry cast his way or he'd have wet himself. He scurried about, issuing contradictory orders and getting in the way until he found himself faced with Professor McGonagall. She eyed him for a moment then snapped, "If you can't do something useful, get to your quarters. I'll deal with you later. Now, go." He gratefully sneaked out of the Great Hall, leaving chaos and confusion in his wake. In other words, business as usual for him.

Harry snarled at a Chinese girl who got in his way, she 'eeped' and scurried away. Justin clung to his hand weakly.

"It's ok. You'll feel a bit weak for a few moments. It's just adrenalin crash." He took the cup of hot, sweet tea the house elf offered and pressed it into Justin's hands. "Drink this."

Harry stood up then and looked around. Snape was snapping orders at the elves while McGonagall was directing the students who'd been far enough away that they were still calm to leave for their common rooms. He patted Justin on the shoulder, motioned to one of his nearby housemates to take over and started helping to control the chaos.



With Snape, McGonagall, Flitwick and Harry working with the prefects who were present and Hermione, they finally got everything sorted out. All the hysterical students were given a calming draught by Madam Pomfrey or Professor Snape, the rest were sent back to their common rooms immediately. The hysterical ones were settled at the Gryffindor table to drink tea and calm down before being sent to follow their fellows.

Then Snape rounded on Harry, "What the devil were you thinking, you stupid boy?" Harry pulled a cigarette out of his case and started smoking. Snape eyed the thing with narrowed eyes but stuck to the point. "Well? Answer me."

Harry shrugged, "I would. If you would please to explain to me what has you so ... in a temper."

"You're a Parselmouth. Not something that is much accepted. I would have thought you would be smart enough to keep such a thing to yourself. It seems I was mistaken." He sneered at the stupid boy.

Harry just looked at him for a moment then replied, "Since it is much different in Japan, where snake speakers are respected for their ability to catch snakes without getting bitten, I never considered it a problem. That only shows how much better Japan is than this cold and stupid place. You're all barbarians. Excuse me." and with that, he took Hermione by the arm and walked out the door.

Hermione just sighed, shoved her hair out of her face and said, "Well, that's a nice pickle we're in." Neville joined them. "Neville."

Harry just smoked as they walked out into the outer courtyard. After they got out, Harry conjured seats with a wave of his hand and settled in one. "Hermione-chan, I swear, you're going to wake up with a haircut if you don't do something about that mess."

Hermione sighed. "It's awful, I know, but I don't know any spells, charms or anything that will tame it. Not even Sleekeasy does the trick."

Neville, rather hesitantly offered, "Well, I've got some stuff that I use. It's easy to make. Gran does up a double batch before I come to school every year. You just brush a dab through ... well, in your case, a bit more than a dab ... but it really works. I'd look like a hedgehog without it."

Harry just held out his hand for the container that Neville held up. "Kudasai. Hermione-chan, I know you have a brush in your pocket."

Hermione handed him the brush and submitted to Harry's attentions. She was as shaken as she'd ever been and the idea of having Harry do something with her wild hair just struck her as calming. Neville hid his amusement and watched as Harry worked a bit of the pomade through Hermione's hair and brushed it until it was smooth and wavy, instead of kinky and wild. He did it up in a neat tail at the nape of her neck and smiled.

"Well, that looks a lot better. Neville-kun, could you ask your Gran for more?"

Hermione interjected, "I'd be pleased to pay?" Neville glowered at her. "Or not. I'm never sure when to offer and when not."

Harry just took the cigarette he'd been smoking out of the corner of his mouth, crushed it and said, "Offer twice for politeness sake then say thank you and be happy for the gift. Then you have to come up with something nice to give in return. It's just giri at it's best. Now. I'm exhausted and hungry. Lets sneak up to the juku and pig out on junk food. The elves will provide, I'm sure."

So that's exactly what they did.

.

Harry eyed the last cake on the plate. "Either of you two want that?"

Hermione shook her head, enjoying the brush of her neat tail against her shoulders and back. "No, but I need to tell you something."

Harry offered the plate to Neville who just shook his head over his teacup. "Ok. What is it?"

"I know who cast that spell. And, I know that Dumbledore won't do a damn thing to him, nor will he let anyone else do anything. Malfoy gets away with murder; literally, I bet."

Harry just smiled serenely. "Oh, so Malfoy-san ... yes. Well, don't worry about him. I have my own plans for him and a few others."

Neville sighed, "Good. That lot are all bad news. Death Eaters in training and those fools aren't limited to Slytherin, no matter what anyone thinks. That Ravenclaw ... Johnston, or something like that. I bet he has the mark already. Seventh year. Hermione? You remember him?"

Hermione nodded around a mouthful of lemon tart. She swallowed and cleared her mouth with a sip of tea. "Yes, I do. He and Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle and that black kid ... I don't remember his name. Well, they were caught going after that first year who quit. Went back to the muggle world, got obliviated and everything. Dumbledore didn't do much but give them detention and tell them 'naughty'. Someone should do something drastic."

Neville nodded, "But ... who and what? I mean, really, I'd just like to see Johnston and Mathias out at least. No one is going to do much to Malfoy and who really cares about Crabbe and Goyle, they're just dumb muscle after all."

Hermione sighed, "Well, true, but even dumb muscle can be dangerous under the right circumstances."

Harry drifted away from the conversation into his thoughts. He had several things to take care of now. He knew who was a bully now, and who was not, for the most part. So ... the next few nights were going to be busy. He wished that he knew some way of detecting this dark mark thing but, in order to figure that out, he had to have access to someone with it. Someone he could experiment on without repercussions.

He was pulled out of his thoughts by Hermione's voice, "Yusuke-kun! Wake up, you gaki. I was asking you a question."

He replied without thinking, something that his father would be very displeased with, "I'm not a gaki. Or even a fuku-honbusho." He blinked, "Ano ... what was it you were asking?"

Hermione blinked at Harry owlishly for a moment while Neville frankly goggled. "Oh ... um ... never mind. I was just ..." She waved her wand then jumped. "Oh, fudge, look at the time. We better hustle or we'll be out after hours. Blast!" She scrambled her notes and books off the desk top, distracting Harry then rushed both boys out the door.

Neville refrained from comment, obediently running along with Hermione. Harry followed them, amused and doing his best not to show it.

.

Harry went ahead of Neville up the stairs. Hermione took the opportunity to grab Neville by the arm and hiss, "I need to tell you something important but ..." Harry called from half way up the stairs so she managed, "Just don't make him mad. Really."

Neville gazed after her for a moment before turning to follow Harry.

"What was that about?"

Neville shook his head, "I have no idea. Sometimes that girl is totally mental. Why would it all of a sudden be so important that I not make you angry?"

Harry narrowed his eyes at Neville for a moment. "No idea. But it really is good advice. Come on, we better get to bed. You're drooping."

Neville got ready for bed and crawled between his sheets. Harry, as expected, got into bed but sat up with a book.

The rest of the dorm was asleep when Harry's mailbox let off a soft ping. He got up and opened it. He was pleased to see three letters for him; one from Genji, one from his father and one from one of his brothers.

He read the gossip from Genji with amused interest and the cautions about baka gaijin as well. The letter from Miyamoto-san had angered him, not because of any fault on his part or that of his father, but because of the information it contained. The Western Wizarding

World was in a mess and he was expected to fix it. This he knew. The part that annoyed him was that they expected him to do it, for free. This was not happening, as his father was quick to assure him. Negotiations were underway. He smiled at that. The last letter from Miyamoto Ichigo was more useful. It was a nice run down of who was who. Who would be useful, who would be a problem and who was just there. It also advised him as to how to go about dealing with the people who needed to be dealt with and who to deal with first.

Yusuke had never disobeyed Ichigo-san when he gave 'advice' and he wasn't about to now.

And the first bit of advice was exactly what he wanted to do anyway, clean up Hogwarts. So ... he'd start with the softest targets, the non-Slytherin problems.

He still wished he knew some way to find out whether they had a mark or not. He didn't think, 'I'll show you mine if you'll show me yours.' was going to work.

.

Severus Snape was on the horns of a dilemma. But not for long.

He rounded on his godson the second they entered his office. "What the devil possessed you to use a borderline dark curse on Potter? Not only that but also one that's a trademark of Death Eaters. You fool!."

Draco sulked. "What's the problem! I'll just send Crabbe and Goyle after him. He'll cave, just like all the others. Perhaps we can even turn him?"

That was when Snape finally connected all the dots. "No. He's ... I can't believe it. You stay away from him. He's no one to mess with."

"Pah! He's just some slant-eyed nobody. Who cares about Mu ... what's his name." Draco fluttered a hand in what he thought was a negligent manner. It really just served to make him look effeminate.

"Miyamoto Musashi. And ... Oh! Damn! Merlin's balls. How could I have been so ... You stay away from him! You hear me? Completely.

He's not some soft target. The way he speaks." Snape made his decision at that moment. He was not involved in this anymore. Voldemort could kiss his ass and Dumbledore too.

Draco was as arrogant as his father, with a lot less reason, so he continued to speak. "What do you know of Japan anyway?"

"Not that much. I went there once, on business for the Dark Lord. I didn't get anywhere much. I ran into a group called yakuza. They talked Japanese like Potter does. And they are not a group that I want to be on the wrong side of. Their Ninja warriors make most Death Eaters look like children. And Miyamoto is the Godfather of them all. He's called something like the Hidden Lord or something. I'd advise you to keep your head down and your mouth shut. Now ... get out." Snape shoved Draco out the door and slammed it.

After thinking for a while, he sat down with a tumbler of Firewhiskey to try to figure out how to cover his ass with three very dangerous people; two of whom had access to him on a daily basis.

.

Harry thought carefully about all he needed to accomplish. He really needed to find out how to detect the dark mark. After several moments thought he wrote another note to his father, requesting help then settled to finish his studying.

After he finished his chapter of History of Magic he added the problem of Binns to his list and went to sleep.

.

Cornelius Fudge eyed his aid with a very jaundiced eye. The letter from the ICW had been short and to the point. They were not allowed to freeze Harry Potter's accounts. They were not allowed, prophecy be damned, to force the boy to fight in their civil war. The aide suggested that they deal with the second problem, perhaps that would fix the first.

The second problem was a very short letter from the Emperor of Japan. It said, "Beware of the anger of Miyamoto. We are." it was signed and sealed by the emperor himself.

"Well, shit. How the hell are we to control that boy if we don't have any leverage?" Fudge looked as put out as he possibly could.

Percy Weasley knew where the gold was, as the Goblins would say, so he just announced, "Agree to whatever Miyamoto demands. If we need that snot that badly, we'll just have to suck it up and pay."

Fudge subsided, grumbling, but agreed that they would allow Potter access to whatever his parents allowed in their wills. Weasley made notes, added to them himself and went away. His notes were quite simple, keep the boy happy.

When he received the letter from Miyamoto Musashi later that day, he just signed off on it as the senior secretary to the minister. The man wanted a face-to-face meeting with the minister as soon as possible. He sent back that they could meet the next day at 2pm. Percy thought that this would put the man off for a bit. He was wrong. He received an acknowledgement within the hour.

.

Miyamoto Musashi was ready for the Minister of Magic. In fact he was ready for the whole ministry, building and all.

He had portkeyed into the main vestibule of the building, accompanied by his youngest son, Masa, and Genji, his wakagashira, as well as a dozen senior kyōdai. They were all heavily armed, muggle and magical. He intended to put the screws to this idiot Fudge, hard.

The group gathered carefully, putting Musashi-sama, Masa-san and Genji-san in the middle. Musashi because he had to be protected and Genji because he was Musashi's shield, his Tate. If there was trouble Genji would step between Musashi-sama and danger. Masa-san had his own Tate.

They walked with purposeful strides to the elevators and got into two. One contained Masa-san and six kyōdai the other held Musashi-sama and the other six. The Tate stayed with their boss. A senior clerk scurried to get into the car with one group. He turned away at the glower aimed at him over a pair of sunglasses and was glad to get away with nothing more.

The intimidating group made their way to the Minister's Office with a minimum of fuss, on their part. For the part of everyone else, they got out of the way. These men were not only magical but also very strongly so. They radiated magic and menace like radiators in mid winter radiated heat.

When they entered the outer office, without knocking, Percy Weasley was at the desk. He'd made sure of that. He was eager to curry favor with the minister but one look at these men made even Percy decide that personal safety was more important than currying favor.

He just opened the inner door and got out of the way.

One of the kyōdai entered the inner office and announced, in a loud voice, "Oyabun Miyamoto Musashi-sama is here."

Everyone entered the room. The kyōdai took positions around the room, standing at ease with their hands clasped in front of them. Genji stood in front of the door with his heels against it to keep anyone from coming in without knocking.

Musashi-sama accepted the seat that Fudge offered him while Masa-san conjured another for himself as Fudge rudely didn't offer. Masa-san's Tate stood behind and between the chairs. Musashi-sama's Tate stood directly behind him.

Fudge eyed all this with disfavor and asked acidically, "Is all this really necessary?"

Musashi-sama just smiled benignly and said, "Of course it is. People of power must be protected. You understand this, being one such yourself. As is my third son." He then rested his elbows in the arms of his chair, folded his hands at chin level and waited.

One of the kyōdai smiled to himself. This was going to be good.

Fudge tried to hold out but the combined weight of seventeen yakuza, all high ranked in one way or another was already making him sweat after two minutes.

.



Remember, with this story, Google is your friend. I'll provide what definitions and such that I have, but for the kimono, Google Images is very good. (FF will not allow links. LJ does.)

Kataginu is the vest thing that is worn over a hakama.

.

Mon are the round crest. [.com/EBchecked/media/58378/Japanese-mon-or-heraldic-emblems-the-mon-is-worn-as](http://www.ebchecked.com/media/58378/Japanese-mon-or-heraldic-emblems-the-mon-is-worn-as)

Senbon – throwing pins. Usually just a length of steel with a point at both ends. Very deadly.

Tate is pronounced Ta-Tay

Fudge broke after four minutes. All the yakuza sneered at him for that, the weakest Japanese had taken ten.

"Yes, well. As to why you're here..." Fudge stopped to sip some tea, completely forgetting to offer his guests any.

Masa-san snorted, but kept his peace. Musashi-sama took the opportunity the pause gave him to take control of the meeting, control that he never lost.

"Yes, why we are here. You invited us here to discuss my son's accounts." The kyōdai who had been brought to translate didn't bother to move from his position against the wall. He just shouted at Fudge. This was a strange and absurdly disturbing counterpoint to Musashi-sama's soft voice. After waiting politely for the translator to finish, the yakuza oyabun continued, "The ICW has seen fit, in its infinite wisdom, to refute your claims on all my son's property, monies and personal possessions, as well as those of Sirius Black, his godfather. I wish to know, for what reason has this man been held without trial for so long?"

Fudge spluttered. "What? Why? ... That is ridiculous. The man betrayed the Potters to You-Know-Who."

Musashi-sama listened to the translator then replied, "No, I don't know who. I would like a copy of the pre-trial transcript, if there is none, then I want access to the man himself. If he is guilty, he will learn the error of his ways. If he is innocent? Well, we'll deal with that, too."

Fudge didn't see any reason to deny the man this sop, it would make dealing with the rest of this mess easier. But Fudge didn't think beyond the needs of the moment any more than he had to, so it never occurred to him that giving in on this was the wedge in the doorway to further concessions.

"Ah, and ... thank you very much for that. I am eternally grateful for your kindness." Musashi-sama smiled at Fudge, a smile that eased the harsh planes of his face but didn't reach his eyes. "We are both men of the world, we understand compromise and debt. Yes?" Fudge winced at the loud voice of the translator but nodded. "Good, good. Now. What we have to offer is this." Musashi-sama outlined what they would offer and what they expected in return.

Fudge, for his part didn't see any problem with providing the yakuza with whatever information they wanted on He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, in fact, he gave the Oyabun a signed letter to 'whom it may concern' ordering them to cooperate completely in supplying information to anyone bearing this letter with any information on any person they asked about. He never realized the comprehensive nature of the letter that Masa-san dictated. He actually wrote it out in his own hand and sealed it while they waited. Genji rolled his eyes in disgust.

"Then there are the school fees. Yusuke does not wish to attend your Hogwarts, so I don't feel that he should have to pay for attending. We're both smart men, aren't we? If you wish for him to do something for you, you need to establish an obligation. Don't you agree?" Fudge nodded, this was something he could understand. Applying the wrong sort of pressure to some young snot wasn't going to get them anywhere, he'd just bull up and refuse. "So ... In order to establish good feeling on his part, perhaps a bit of a treat of some sort? From you to him? You see? Give him the illusion of freedom, while ... keeping him on a leash? My son is a good boy but easily insulted. I've found it a great deal easier to let him run until he's tired, then show him what is wanted. He's usually most ... accommodating." Musashi-sama wondered if Fudge just liked shit, or couldn't recognize it when he saw it. He was eating up this silliness with a spoon.

"Of course, I see. Perhaps some sort of permission to leave the school at designated times outside of Hogsmeade weekends? To visit his properties, perhaps? Or Diagon Alley visits on Hogsmeade weekends? That would be acceptable, right?" Fudge saw this as a way to ingratiate himself with both father and son by making it possible for Musashi to take Harry on visits to his family home, Diagon Alley and so on. "I'll write that out, shall I?"

Musashi-sama nodded over his folded hands. "Yes. That would be wonderful. Perfect. You're a very wise man. Very politically savvy. Yes?"

There was a cough from somewhere then a bang at the door. Percy glowered at the unresponsive panel for a moment then knocked again. The door opened, a face was thrust into his and Genji snarled, "What?" Percy made a soft noise then withdrew.

Musashi-sama never blinked, confident in the ability of his people to handle anything. He just remarked, "If I have to get up, someone is going to be sorry." The translator didn't translate that, there was no need.

Fudge paled remarkably and fretted, "What was that? Who was it? What did they want?"

Genji-san smiled at him and said in his bad English, "No worry. Just red man. He go." Genji smiled again, this time to himself, his English was as good as Harry's and much better than Musashi-sama's, but the 'no speakie English' gambit worked almost every time.

"Oh, Weaselby, he's alright. Now, where were we?" Fudge returned his distracted attention back to business. "You were getting ready to discuss payment for ... um ... services rendered. Right?"

Masa-san took over the negotiations, tag teaming Fudge with Musashi-sama. Every time one of them made a demand, the other distracted Fudge with a question about something else pertaining to the fight against Voldemort. The translator interspersed the two conversations randomly, confusing Fudge even more.

Finally, Genji-san presented Fudge with a written contract, in elegant Kanji on thick, ice white rice paper. The contract called for the ministry to pay all Harry's expenses, incidental as well as direct and anticipated. Harry was also to be paid a salary per month equivalent to that of a head of department and hazardous duty pay. In other words Fudge got royally screwed, without a kiss. He signed and sealed it while Masa-san and Musashi-sama reassured him, smiling politely, that it was just a formality.

And it was just a formality, until it was registered with the ICW that is.

Everyone stood, bowed, shook hands and agreed that their business was done. Fudge never realized that he'd never offered anyone refreshments, a deadly insult in Japan. He also never realized that he'd been taken to the cleaners by experts, until it came time to pay the toll. By then, it was much too late.

As they left the office, Musashi-sama said, "What an idiot. And so rude. Never offered a drop of tea or a crumb of rice. And he stinks.

Bah! Poor Yusuke-kumicho, to have to deal with a bunch of stinking barbarians like that on a daily basis. Send him a treat of some sort. Genji, take note?"

Genji-san nodded. "Sure thing, boss."

Masa-san agreed with his father. "Really, father, more than just a treat. Send him something really nice. Poor little brother. Disgusting."

Genji-san glowered at some functionary or other who'd stepped into his way. The man yelped and jumped back into the doorway. "At least we didn't have to lean on him. Right, Boss?"

"Yes. That was good. But ... I would have enjoyed it." Musashi-sama managed to look a bit sad at that.

They all stepped into the huge commercial fireplace in the Atrium and exited in Japan.

Letters were sent to Harry's kaikei and Shingiin, with orders and copies of all pertinent papers.

Fudge gave his copies of everything to Percy, who just read them then filed them. He was sure that Fudge was on his way out, but he was stuck here with no way back.

.

While Harry spent most of his week finishing investigations into how to access the different houses, his father was involved in much more interesting things.

The first thing was to register all contracts between Fudge and Harry/Yusuke with the ICW, under both his names. No chance of wiggling out for the British Ministry.

This didn't take long, Nakajima Haruhiro, as Saiko-Komon, took care of this. He took his friend and contact at the ICW to lunch, gossiped shamelessly and had the registration done in three hours, neatly slipping it by Dumbledore in the process.

Then Ichigo-san took twenty men, including four healers to Azkaban to get Sirius Black.

They refused to deal with the foolishness the English guards wanted, they just announced that they had papers from the ICW and, as representatives of same, they were taking Black with them. The guards took one look at the hard, cold faces of the stocky men and their coal black eyes and allowed them to do as they pleased. After all, they had the proper papers and, well, they weren't paid enough to fight off these men. And who cared if they took a traitor or not.

Sirius Black looked up from his bed when the door of his cell opened. His hopeless expression turned to hope when a man motioned to him to stand up. He stood and shambled over to the door.

When he got there, he was addressed by one of the men who asked, "You speak Nihongo?"

Sirius wondered for a moment what that was then realized that the man was waiting for an answer. "Sorry. no. Um ..." he scrambled around within his skull for something to say. His mind was sluggish and he felt as if his thoughts were swimming in syrup.

"Never mind. You come. We leave. Now." The gaki took Sirius by the arm and gently pulled him out of the cell. "Musho no good for you."

Sirius wasn't sure what musho was but he was happy to agree with the man. He really didn't care where he was going, as long as it was out of here.

He was a bit surprised to have an older man run his hands over his chest, mumbling softly. Sirius felt a warm glow then the man nodded once in a decisive manner and turned to speak to another stern faced man.

A short walk later and they were on the dock. Sirius expected to see a boat there but instead, he was handed the end of a piece of rope. He recognized the portkey at once. He took hold of it then waited.

"International. We go. Now." Sirius braced himself. "Iku!"

Sirius stumbled when they landed, falling flat on his back. He was dismayed to find that he didn't have the strength to get back up.

He was helped up by two men who walked him into a beautiful building and straight into a shower. He started to protest then shut up. He reckoned that he probably smelled horrible. He didn't resist as he was stripped, just protesting, "Hey! I've still got some stuff, you know."

He let them soap him thoroughly and scrub him down with soft bristled brushes. Before he could protest again someone held a small basket under his nose, asking, "This all?"

He replied, "Yes, that's the sum total of my worldly possessions." then he blinked as one of the men poured shampoo over his head.

Finally, scrubbed, scoured and shaven, he was shown how to put on the robe called a yukata and led into a furniture-less room. He was shown how to sit on a small pillow and then, wonder of wonders, he was offered soup. He nodded, said, "Thank you." and through main force of will, refrained from gulping it down in two swallows. He put the bowl back on the tiny table and was rewarded with a quick smile.

A few moments later he faced a man of about 60, by appearance. He was well aware that a wizard could be much older than he appeared.

The man bowed carefully from the waist, keeping his eyes on Sirius. "Konichiwa, Sirius Black-san. Excuse my poor English, please."

Sirius decided a small joke was possible. "For another bowl of that soup, I can excuse a lot more than poor English."

"Good, good. Ano ... watashi no namae wa Miyamoto Musashi-oyabun." Musashi pointed to his nose with one finger.

Sirius thought about that for a moment then bowed slightly. "My name is Sirius Black. Pleased to meet you."

Musashi-san smiled. "Excellent, may I call you ... which is your family name?"

Sirius looked confused for a moment before recalling from somewhere that Japanese people said the family name first. "You can call me by my first name, Sirius, if you like."

"Ah. That is not done. Yet. We do not knowing each other long enough. I shall call you Black-san. Yes?"

"Ok, that's fine. I should call you Miyamoto ... what was it? San? Miyamoto-san? If I screw up, please don't take offense."

"Very good. I hope you stay long time. We get along good. Now. I have translator here. We have important things to discuss and no mistakes can be made." Musashi called in the translator and spent the next hour plying Sirius with tea, food and information.

Sirius, for his part, had a very hard time keeping calm. There were several times when he wanted to scream out, but he held it in. Offending his host wasn't something that seemed wise.

The translator smiled when he finished the last of Musashi's words and bowed slightly. "Now, I'm sure you have questions. Please ask."

Sirius did have questions, but not for his host. He explained, "I have questions but I know you can't answer most of them. Frankly, I'm sick and I know it. I have to have someplace to recover. But not in England. Can I stay here? I'd be glad to pay, no insult intended, if you need me to."

The translator didn't bother to do more than translate before saying, "No need. Our Oojisama would cut us into fish bait if we made you pay. There's no question of you not staying either. So ... you go to bed now. Rest. Someone will stay with you in case you need something."

Sirius nearly collapsed with relief. "Thank you. I need to lie down now. I'm about to fall over, frankly."

He was bundled into a strange but comfortable bed that one of the men in the room took from a closet. They covered him, told him to sleep and left, all but one man, who settled in a pile of cushions with a newspaper. Sirius closed his eyes and went to sleep.



.

Harry glanced at his watch. It was one of the best Rolex self-winding mechanical watches available on the market. It was a bit of an antique, made in 1968. The Oyster Perpetual had a black dial and a sapphire crystal. The band was a replacement but was the original bracelet style. He had decided to wear it because of the after market addition of a reel garrote, it made the case a bit thicker but, due to the thinness of the wire and mechanism, it wasn't noticeable unless you were an expert on the Rolex watch.

He sighed, they were going to be late for breakfast. Not that it mattered, as it was Saturday. But he wanted to get to Hogsmeade. It was the first Hogsmeade weekend and he was hoping to meet up with his Kaikei for a bit. He wondered if the town had a garden. He missed his terribly.

He looked at his watch again then shouted up the stairs, "Oi! Neville-kun, hurry up. Hermione-chan will be coming up to grab you by the ear."

He flinched as Hermione swatted him on the shoulder, exclaiming, "Not a chance. I'm not about to set foot in that pigsty."

They both laughed. Harry acknowledged that his dorm mates were pigs then announced, "But I have high hopes. They can't continue on that way much longer."

Hermione cast a puzzled look in his direction. "And why not?"

Neville came down the stairs just then, and overhearing her question, answered it for him. "Because they're going to run out of mess to make. Yusuke-kun is throwing stuff that's out of place out the window. It's driving the house elves mad. Not to mention Dean and Ron."

Hermione huffed then said, "And not you or Seamus?"

"Me? Oh, no." Neville shook his head with a grin. "I was taught to pick up after myself by our elves and I don't dare just drop things, I'll forget something important if I do that. And Seamus claims that his Mam would have his head if he made a mess for servants. So it's just those two."

Harry shook his head in mock dismay. "I don't believe that two people could be so messy. I just ... it's ridiculous and I'm not putting up with it anymore. If they want to keep their things, they can put them away."

Neville snickered a bit meanly. "I've put up with it for five years because I didn't see a way to stop them. Don't tell, but I just threw Ron's favorite pants out the window. I really ... he just drops things everywhere and I really don't want them on my bed. That's ..." He paused, trying to think of how to express himself

Harry helped out. "That is disgusting, irresponsible and very rude. Perhaps even dishonorable. Underthings belong in your trunk, on your person or in the laundry basket. Not strewn all over other people's private space."

Hermione nodded her agreement then demanded, "Well? Come on, I'm hungry and I want to see what new Japanese treats the elves have made for us. I really love all this."

Neville agreed but announced, "I'm hankering for some old fashioned bacon and eggs today."

Harry laughed, "Good for you. I'll have to admit that a proper English fry up is too heavy for my stomach. It's always been a bit delicate. I think it's because the Dursleys didn't think I needed to eat more than twice a week. Messed up my digestion." He ignored Hermione's flapping mouth and headed for the Great Hall.

One thing that he'd learned early, it didn't do to try to hide what had been done to him. Secrets were dangerous weapons that could rebound to cut you so it was best that they were either very carefully guarded or didn't exist. So he made no secret of how he'd been treated by his relatives.

Neville was already used to remarks like this so he only snorted. Hermione, on the other hand, was still trying to reason out how someone could treat a child in their care like Harry had been treated. This came out in a tendency to argue that Harry had to be wrong, or had misinterpreted their actions in some way. Needless to say, Harry was not pleased by this at all.

"Yusuke-kun, I'm sure that they fed you. Just perhaps ..." Hermione caught sight of his face just in time. Almost.

"Granger-san, we will never agree on this. I know what they intended, they shouted it at me often enough. They did not like magic and intended to starve and beat it out of me. Now, I'm not a stupid person and my memory is more or less perfect. Please do not argue with me any longer. Especially if you wish to remain my friend." He stopped, faced Hermione and bowed. "Excuse me. My appetite is ... gone."

Hermione looked like she might cry but Neville rounded on her. "Hermione, shut it will you. Turning into a watering pot now is much too late. Why do you insist on doing that? He knows what he knows. We have no idea and arguing with him over remarks like that is the height of stupidity. If you piss him off enough, you'll wind up alone. I have no intention of being forced to choose between you. Do you understand?"

Hermione nodded miserably. "I know. I just ... I don't understand how someone could ... be unkind to a small child. It doesn't make sense."

"Death Eaters don't make sense either, but they exist. Some people are just wrong headed and there's no changing them. Just agree with him next time he makes a remark like that." Neville tugged Hermione on their way, continuing, "Besides, it really doesn't make any difference what the truth is. All that really matters is, what he believes is the truth. And don't you forget it."

Hermione thought about that comment all the way to breakfast. She realized that Neville was right, arguing with Harry over what he felt was stupid. He felt what he felt, never mind truth. She gave it up as a bad job altogether and resolved to quit arguing with Harry over it. Now all she had to do was make up with him, again.

Neville seemed to realize what was going on in her head as he remarked as they settled on a bench. "You have to stop this. There's only so many forgives in the deck, you know. One day he's going to run out." He served himself some bacon before Ron got hold of the platter. "I know I'm not exactly the one to give advice. But I'm shy, not stupid. And I've got more backbone than you'd think. I just hate shouting matches. Gran got her way, not because she was right, but

because her voice could shatter glass, she's my guardian and she's older. Uncle got his way because Gran insisted. But I managed to keep the houses running and things on a fairly even keel because I just bulled up and did it. See?"

Hermione agreed that she did see. She turned her attention to her breakfast, thinking hard.

She had always thought that intellect would guide her through anything, it turned out that it wouldn't. Her feelings, her heart had to take part too, or she alienated everyone around her. Neville had tried to tell her, along with Ron and her room mates, but she'd been stubborn and set on proving that she was right and they were wrong. She'd wound up with roommates who tolerated her and one single friend. How Neville had stuck it out, she'd never really know. But she was realizing, at much too late a date that she was wrong and they were right. Now, how to fix the mess she was in was beyond her.

Neville had to be psychic as he said, "Hermione, steam is pouring out your ears, your brain is overheating. Just give everyone time to see that you really want to change. But you really do have to want to, not just want friends under any circumstances. Understand?"

Hermione did and agreed with Neville then went back to eating, shoving a spoonful of porridge into her mouth to keep from grumbling. As Harry hadn't come to breakfast with them, there were no Japanese treats for anyone.

Neville just mumbled, "Serves you right." and went back to his potatoes.

.

Harry walked down to Hogsmeade, taking it easy. He could have made it from the doors of Hogwarts, through the front courtyard and gates, down the path and to the main square in less than ten minutes. Instead, it took him nearly twenty. It took that long for him to calm down. He didn't mind being called a liar, he was, he just resented being called one when he was telling the truth.

As he was walking, despite the fact that he was thinking, he saw something out of the corner of his eye. A small ball was flying toward his head. Someone had flung some sort of grenade at him. He

snatched it out of the air and banished it quickly. But not so quickly that he didn't know everything he needed to know about it. One of the Weasley twins had tossed it at him. Now, to most people, something banished is just gone. Not to Harry. He could banish something completely, or he could banish it to a holding space much like his Mallet space. From there it could be retrieved for future use. In this case, study, to see what it was. He took a moment to glare around. He caught a glimpse of Weasley red hair but wasn't sure exactly who it was.

"Ano ... who? Hummm. This needs taking care of." Anyone who was near enough would have heard the threat in that soft voice. Luckily, or unluckily, no one was.

Harry wandered around a bit, looking in windows and watching the younger students scamper here and there.

He didn't jump when he was joined by several Yakuza. One just bowed to him saying, "Oi, Kumicho." while the rest took up traditional places around him.

He nodded his approval, got out a cigarette and took a drag. "Ok, what do we know?" he didn't notice, nor would he have cared about, the looks he got for speaking Japanese.

"Not that much. We still have feelers out for more. I'll write up a report as soon as we know the major players." The speaker was Harry's new wakagashira, Ito Ken-ichi. He'd been chosen by Miyamoto Musashi himself. His letters had been sent, along with a picture, via Harry's mailbox.

Harry nodded at him. "Hn. Orders?" Harry was well aware that his father would never write down a certain type of order.

"Sorry, Boss, the Oyabun says to thin the ranks, low to high. We'll have names and particulars as soon as we can. He wants you to take care of most of it yourself. You've got diplomatic immunity ... we don't. My humble apologies."

"No matter. Don't worry about it. Just get me intel as soon as you can." Harry shivered a bit. "It's fucking cold in this dreary place. Inside." He opened the door to the Hogshead and walked in.

After taking in the room with one glance, Harry motioned for one of the gaki to go to the bar, telling him to bring back full English for anyone who wanted it. He was hungry and he knew that all he'd get here was a rather bad fry up, but that was better than nothing.

But the gaki had other ideas. "You hungry, or you just want to make some kind of impression?" the man knew he was taking his 'life' in his hands but he didn't care. It was his duty to take proper care of his kumicho and that was exactly what he was going to do.

"I got upset and didn't eat breakfast. Go get me something to eat." Harry wasn't as surprised as someone else might have been when the gaki just popped away.

He returned a moment later with a magnificent bento. His smile proved that he'd made it himself. "Please. Enjoy."

Harry took the top off the multi-compartment bento and grinned back at the gaki. The bento contained maki sushi, fried rice, pickles and fruit. It was more what one would have for lunch but Harry didn't care. He just said, "Thank you for sacrificing your lunch to me. It looks very good." And it was.

After he finished the bento Harry got up, motioned to his men to follow him and walked out of the dirty inn. "I think that place should be cleaned up. See to it." He didn't care if the proprietor wanted his services or not. His men would not live in filth. "I want a man stationed there 24/7 in case I need him. Not the same man all the time either. See to it."

A chorus of "Hai, Hai, Kumicho!" echoed around the narrow street, making people glance their way. A few glares sent most of them off about their business again.

One person just watched for a moment then followed as they walked down the byway and into the main square.

.

Hermione and Neville took their time getting to the square, hoping that Harry would be calmed down by the time they got there. They were just walking in one side as Harry entered the other.

Heroine took it upon herself to attract his attention by waving vigorously and yelling, "Oi! Oi! Yusuke-kun! Over here." Neville winced. This was something that no wizard would do; except, perhaps, a Weasley. They were well known for manners more fitting to someone 'raised in a barn' as the saying went.

Hermione's actions caused everyone in the square to stare at her for a moment before dismissing her as 'that Granger girl' at it again. Harry just sighed, things like that weren't done in Japan either. If you wanted someone's attention, you just called them on their cell.

He waved back and waited until Hermione and Neville made their way over. Hermione was treated to a very thorough looking over while Neville submitted, with some surprise, to a pat down. Harry didn't make a move to stop his men.

When the search was over, Harry exhaled a cloud of smoke while saying, "Hello, Neville-kun. Hermione-chan. I'd like to introduce you to my wakagashira Ito Ken-ichi and my gaki and kyōdai. They'll have to tell you their names if you're interested, there's too many of them for individual introductions in a common street." He smirked at Neville who was white as a sheet. "Neville?"

"You're ... oh, shite. ... Merlins pants. Um ..." Neville couldn't believe he hadn't figured it out when he'd seen Harry's tattoos. But Yakuza weren't something he would have thought of in relation to The-Boy-Who-Lived.

Hermione just got a blank look on her face. One of the gaki started to say something but Harry hushed him, whispering, "Quiet. You have to see this. She's really amazing."

Hermione stared blankly into the near distance as her brilliant mind put all the pieces together for the first time. "Oh! Oh! Oojisama! And ... and ... Miyamoto Musashi? Which generation is he? Never mind. And ... Miyamoto Yusuke! You! Oh, my." She blinked then looked around. "Yusuke-kun, you are a yakuza. And high ranked. How the heck did you manage that."

Neville looked scared and started to say something but Hermione cut him off saying, "Oh, Neville, calm down. Yakuza never do much to civilians. It's just not done. They might punch you once or twice as

a warning but I'm sure that's not necessary. Is it?" She turned her eyes to Harry.

Harry had to laugh and all his danseï, men, followed suit. "Hermione-chan, how can I stay mad at you? You're brilliant. And, no, we don't usually do much to civilians, you're all way too helpless. So. No more arguing about things you ... never mind. I refuse to go there."

Hermione bit her lip. "I'm sorry. I just ..." She spread her hands helplessly. "I don't understand how anyone can be so cruel to a small child. They have to be ... crazy."

Harry couldn't help it, he had to chuckle a bit darkly. "I think you might be right. And, I think that's why I hate to talk about them so much. Come, forget them. Fun time now."

Hermione nodded. "Ok." she smiled, "Honeydukes, now."

Harry raised an eyebrow at Neville who shrugged and said, "Never get between a woman and chocolate."

Harry held up one hand in a helpless gesture. "Never. It's more than your life is worth. Come, you." The last was in Japanese. All the yakuza formed up and followed the three teens.

The walk to Honeydukes was interesting to Harry. He didn't remember ever being in a small English village before, especially not a magical one. He walked slowly and looked at every shop, house and cart in the street. He smiled to see that some shops had apartments over them, obviously for the owner to live in or rent out. He wondered if he shouldn't find a place for a few of his gaki to live in, closer to Hogwarts.

He turned to Ito-san and said, "I'm wondering about the wisdom of having several men here in Hogsmeade instead of just one. What do you think?"

Ito started looking around at the various buildings. "Not a bad idea, boss. But not here, in the middle of the town. I think someplace a bit more secluded would be better."



Harry nodded. "There's an old, abandoned building between Hogwarts and Hogsmeade, see about buying that." Ito bowed and made notes. He also sent a couple of men to look the house over.

Neville turned to Harry and told him, "That's the Shrieking Shack. Some people say it's the most haunted house in Scotland. I have my doubts about that. But it's a real mess, been abandoned for years. Good luck, you're going to need it."

Harry shrugged. "My men can handle a ghost. And, if they can't, I can."

Neville snickered, "Peeves comes to mind. Never thanked you for getting rid of him. But I'd be careful about banishing any other ghosts. Professor Dumbledore might not like it if you banish a house ghost."

"Peeves wasn't a ghost, he was a poltergeist. I really don't like them. I tend to banish first and ask questions later. Ghosts, on the other hand, are usually stuck. Or they want to remain behind. I tend to ask them if they want to move on." Harry lit a cigarette, waving away a gaki who offered him a lighter, saying, "No thanks, I've got it."

He stood, smoking, while Neville and Hermione went into Honeydukes to buy sweets. He longed for mochi for some strange reason. He watched as two of his men followed his friends into the store. He made note of their faces for later.

It took about twenty minutes for Hermione and Neville to return to the group. Harry nodded to the men who followed after. He also laughed at the expression on one man's face.

He was following Hermione who was chattering away in fractured Japanese. The man joined the group and Harry overheard him grumble, "She talks like a boryokudan from anime. What gives?"

Harry turned his head and said, "She reads manga and picked it up from that. Humor her. It's kawaii."

All the yakuza smiled at the mix of Japanese and English, it was very common amongst them to mix languages depending on which ones they spoke.

All the danseï agreed, "Hai, Hai, Kumicho, Kawaii!" Harry snorted softly then turned to Ito. "When are you going to see about that house?"

Ito bowed to Harry and said, "I think I should go write a letter or two if you want that house. I'll check to see how to get a hold of it. Ok?"

Harry nodded. "Fine. If you get it, see that it's fit to live in before anyone actually moves in."

"Ok, boss, but ... I think letting the men working on it move in would ... encourage quick work." Ito bowed at Yusuke's wicked smile and walked off.

Hermione insisted on a quick trip to the stationers for more parchment, even though the whole group was using paper and pencil for their preliminary work, they still needed parchment for their final copy. They were all running out so she was going to buy a ream so they could split it up between them.

Harry just jerked his head at a man who followed Hermione without comment.

The rest of the group continued to wander the town, looking in windows and watching the passersby.

Hermione joined up with them nearly two hours after she left. Harry hadn't worried about her and had reassured Neville, saying, "She's got one of my danseï with her and he's got a panic button. If anything happens, we'll know. Relax." he offered Neville a cigarette with a grin. "Smoke?"

Neville shuddered and refused. "No, I thank you. How you can smoke anything like that is beyond me."

Harry just grinned and smoked his cigarette.

One of the gaki caught sight of Professor Lockhart and nudged Harry who immediately went into Yusuke mode. "Kumicho, who's that twink."

Harry looked over his shoulder, exhaled a cloud of smoke in an aggravated puff then said, "Our Defense Against the Dark Arts professor." Then he had to repeat himself in Japanese.

Every single head turned to watch Lockhart as he minced along the street. His extremely thick boot soles and high heels made him cautious on the freshly washed sidewalk. He noticed the group of strange looking, staring men and nodded to them, smiling in what he thought was a genial manner. It just made him look even more ridiculous.

Hermione crossed her arms under her breasts and snarled, "Baka yarou!"

Yusuke blinked then said, "Language, Granger-san."

Hermione just pouted at him. All the danseï laughed behind their hands.

After another hour of people watching and commenting, much of it in rude Japanese, they decided to get lunch. Neville suggested the Three Broomsticks as opposed to Hermione's suggestion of Madam Puddifoots. Harry sent one of the danseï to check both out.

The man came back and announced, in English, that Madam Puddifoots was Pink. That settled it for all the group. They were going to the Three Broomsticks. Hermione tried to pout, but she was giggling way too much. Harry silently approved.

.

Rosmerta looked up as her pub was invaded by a group of around fifteen men, not counting the three Hogwarts students. She watched as they bulled their way through the door, pushing a couple of laborers aside as they came in. She didn't recognize any of them and just hoped that they didn't start a brawl that would destroy the common room.

There was a bit of pushing and shoving as the danseï made room for them all to be seated together, with Harry at the head of a table and Hermione seated ceremoniously at the foot.

Rosmerta decided to wait on that table herself, just to get a feel for the group in case she needed to call the Aurors or some of the home guard. She just did not feel like a situation on Hogsmeade day. Impressionable young children didn't need to see the sorts of things some men did to each other in a fight.

She didn't miss Ito as he eased into the room, glancing around quickly then settling at Harry's right.

.

Harry looked around, satisfied himself that everything was as it should be, and sat down. He smiled at Hermione who was red-faced but smiling.

After some consultation between Harry and Ito, it was decided they let Madam Rosmerta serve family style. Harry let Neville, who was seated at his left, help him pick dishes from the list Madam rattled off.

They wound up with steamed broccoli, garlic mashed potatoes, roast, green beans and salad, for afters Hermione suggested apple and pear crumble. It wasn't long before huge bowls appeared, carried in by Madam Rosmerta and the cook. The roast was already carved and arranged on a huge platter.

Harry, as host, took the first serving of every dish and ate a bite. Hermione frowned at this until the man at her right, chosen for this place because of his good English, explained, "Kumicho eat first in Japan. Prove that food is good."

Hermione looked puzzled, "Excuse me? Madam Rosmerta always serves the best."

"Not ... Don't know word. Dokubutsu in food."

Hermione looked blank for a moment then realized. "Oh! Poison. Ugh! Is that common?"

The man grimaced, but allowed, "Not so much now. But ... once, very common. Angry Oyabun call men in and have banquet. Those ones who are not in favor, die. Rest, ok. See?"

"I do. You people have some ... very strange customs." Hermione smiled a bit.

"To us, you have very strange customs too." He smiled back and returned to his mash.

Hermione looked over the table and realized that she was sitting at a table with fifteen yakuza and shuddered a bit. This was getting very weird, even for the wizarding world.

Harry noticed Hermione shiver and gave her companion a warning glower, he just shrugged a bit fatalistically and nodded back.

They soon finished eating. Harry had to pay the check and followed the rest of his men out the door.

Hermione wound up next to Neville. Neville offered her his arm, which she took. She'd been foolish enough to refuse in first year and had gotten a thundering scold from McGonagall about proper manners and never forgot it.

Neville touched Harry on the shoulder, "Yusuke. Are you really going to buy the Shrieking Shack?"

"Yes, I am. I don't like not having my men near me. It's ... a Japanese thing. I need to have them near me to see that they're ... taking care of themselves. And I like having a retreat. Dumbledore ... I just don't trust him. He could have prevented the Ministry from taking my property. Where was he? What was he doing instead? Is it that he's overloaded? Or is there something else going on? See?"

Neville nodded. "Yes, I do. He never does anything without his all encompassing 'Greater Good' in mind. Or, he gets so busy meddling at the ICW that he forgets everything else. That's how some of those obnoxious 'creature' laws got passed. And now, he's just letting them go." Neville subsided into grumbling about laws that had no business being on the books at all. Neville wasn't that fond of Dumbledore himself. After all, the man could have convinced his Gran to allow him to go to a hedge school, at the Weasleys, instead of suffering through several incompetent tutors, all hired by his uncle.

They didn't hurry, but they were soon at the shack. And shack it was. It wasn't built to be a shack, but it was run down enough that the epithet fit.

Ito-san looked at the house and sighed, it was big. It was three floors of disaster. He wondered how many bedrooms it had. And if it had proper bathrooms. He shook his head, this was going to be hard.

Harry gazed at his new house and then at his men. "Do your best. I know it will be difficult, but I really need this. I need a place close at hand, with people I can trust. Persevere." His voice was soft, his Japanese very formal. All his new men knew what that meant. This was much more important than he was telling. Harry motioned to the men. "Well, come along. Let's see how bad it is."

.

It was very bad. The first floor consisted of a kitchen, entryway, lounge and another room. It was so destroyed that no one could decide if it was a dining room or what. They finally decided that it was a dining room, no matter what its original function was to have been.

The second floor had another lounge, or library, the books scattered all around, in various stages of destruction indicated library. There were also two bed/sitting rooms with a bath room between them.

The third floor had four more, large bedrooms and another bath. Harry decided that they were large enough to hold six men each, if they were furnished Japanese style. None of the men commented, if the kumicho wanted them to live in a dump, they were just glad to have a real futon to sleep on.

After examining all the upper floors and making lists of what needed to be done on each floor, they went into the cellar. This was a whole other kettle of fish. The cellar was divided into storage rooms, what was obviously house elf quarters and, at the end of the corridor, which went from one end of the house to the other, they found what was obviously a tunnel. Where it went, no one was sure. Harry ordered Ito to make sure where it came out and to let him know at once.

The small group of students headed back for Hogwarts, leaving the danseï at the shack.

.

When they reached the outer courtyard, they were greeted by Professor Flitwick, who told them that they were to go to the Great Hall at once and stay there until further notice.

Harry glanced at Neville who shrugged. Hermione bit her lip in thought then announced, "I don't know. This isn't the way things are done. What? ... Oh, dear, something is very wrong." She pointed at the high table. "Look, all the professors are at their table."

Harry frowned. "I don't like this. Stay near me, both of you."

Hermione looked like she was going to argue for a second, but, after glancing around at all the confused faces, she nodded once. Neville fingered his wand as he nodded too.

It was another fifteen minutes before the last of the student body returned, grumbling at their interrupted day.

Dumbledore stood in front of the head table and announced, "Attention, please!" The chatter died down quickly, after he fired a bang with his wand. "Thank you. Now ... I am sorry to interrupt your pleasures, but ... Mr. Filch has been petrified. This terrible tragedy is why you will all return to your houses, and prepare yourselves to be questioned by the staff. Your Head of House will be with you all shortly. If anyone knows anything about this attack, please tell them. No one will, I assure you, think ill of you. This is not tattling on a prankster, this is much more serious. Now ... everyone off. Pip pop! Off you go."

Harry scowled at Dumbledore for a moment then snorted. "Like anyone is going to admit to anything." He pinned the twins with his scowl. They both gave him back a head shake. He resolved to put the screws to them as soon as he could.

The return to the common room was exactly what Harry expected. McGonagall swept in, demanded answers to several very intrusive questions and ... got nowhere, quickly.

The Weasley twins double talked her into a headache, but proved that they'd been at Zonko's at exactly the time Filch had been found. The rest of the house also had alibis, except for one first year, who wasn't sure where she'd been. McGonagall reassured her that she really wasn't a suspect, as petrification was way beyond a first year.

Harry snorted and announced to his small grouping, "Petrification is beyond a seventh year. Someone ... never mind. I'd like to see where it happened."

Professor McGonagall took that opportunity to tell everyone that they were confined to their House until morning, they would dine in their common rooms.

Hermione announced that she was not eating anywhere near Ron Weasley, and stomped up to her room, her roommates followed her. In fact, most of the girls returned to their dorms to eat.

Harry announced that there was no way he was eating in the filth of the common room. Neville and Seamus followed him up with Dean coming in about five minutes later. House elves appeared soon after that with bento for Harry, Neville and Dean and plates of meatloaf, potatoes and green beans for Ron and Seamus.

No one said much, they just ate and turned their attention to other pursuits. Seamus, Dean and Ron started up a rather noisy game of gobstones, while Neville shut his bed curtains to shut out the noise so he could study. Harry 'went all Yusuke' on the noisy trio and chased them down to the common room. He then turned his own attention to studying, covering his desk with scraps of paper and open books.

Harry studied until after curfew, then he quietly changed clothing and left the room.

He opened the common room door, smiling at the seal that someone thought would keep him in.

He used simple tricks to get to the site of the attack, tricks like staying in shadows, or climbing a wall to stick himself to the rafters until Snape passed by beneath him.



He found the area easily enough, someone had kindly marked it off with some sort of paint. He examined the floors and wall carefully. The words on the wall said, "Squibs and Mudbloods beware. The Chamber of Secrets is open. Go while you can." he snorted, he could come up with a better threat in his sleep. The words were written in chicken blood.

He turned his attention to the floor next. It was very smooth from centuries of feet shuffling over it, but now there were several shallow scratches. Harry examined these carefully. They looked as if something very heavy had passed, dragging ... what? Harry knew he'd seen similar scratches but he couldn't remember where.

He returned to his bed with much to think about. He stayed in his bed for an hour then he remembered something. The Weasley twins and their joke.

He got up, found the small ball and examined it carefully. It was a prank. And not a really nice one either. The ball contained a liquid that would remove all the hair it touched, for 48 hours. He contemplated it for a moment then grinned.

A pathetic 'mow' attracted his attention as he was passing through the common room.

"Ah, Neko. Poor neko. Come with me." He bent down and scooped up Mrs. Norris. He'd have to take care of her. If he didn't, who would?

He took Mrs. Norris to his bed, converted a handkerchief into a closed bed for her and slipped back out.

It didn't take him long to figure out that the twins slept in their own room. He'd checked the seventh year dorm and not found them. After a quick reconnoiter he found their room, across the landing from the seventh year dorm. One sniff and he knew why. They were brewing pranks in their room. He shook his head, tossed the small ball into the room and went back to his room and to bed.

.

Iku – go!

Koi – come

musho – prison

chp12